

**Jewish life in Hungary:
Achievements, challenges and priorities
since the collapse of communism**

András Kovács and Aletta Forrás-Biró

The **Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR)** is a London-based independent research organization, consultancy and think-tank. It aims to advance the prospects of Jewish communities in Britain and across Europe by conducting research and developing policy in partnership with those best placed to influence Jewish life.

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Contents

Editor's introduction	3
1 Basic data on Hungarian Jews and Hungarian Jewish organizations	7
2 Major achievements and milestones over the past twenty years	12
3 Major philanthropic investments over the past twenty years	14
4 Jewish community life and its organizations	15
4.1 Religious institutions and religious life	15
4.2 Jewish education	21
4.3 Jewish culture	25
4.4 Academic Jewish studies	27
4.5 Preservation of Jewish heritage	29
4.6 Young adult (18-30) engagement	32
4.7 Leadership development	35
4.8 Innovation and social entrepreneurship	36
4.9 Funding and philanthropy	38
4.10 Welfare: children and the elderly	40
4.11 Combating antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment	42
4.12 Israel education, advocacy and <i>aliyah</i> (emigration to Israel)	44
5 Summary	47
Appendix A	
Map of officially organized Jewish religious communities in contemporary Hungary	51
Appendix B	
Jewish organizations in Hungary	52

Editor's Introduction

Since the fall of communism over twenty years ago, East-Central Europe has experienced tremendous political, economic and social change, and the Jews living there have inevitably been affected by the developments that have taken place. The advent of democracy, the integration into the European Union, the rise of populism, major demographic shifts and the global recession have all had an impact on Jewish communities throughout Europe. All these factors combined call for the rigorous identification and up-to-date analysis of the changing needs and challenges facing the Jewish communities in East-Central Europe today.

With this in mind, we are publishing this report as the first in a series examining how Jewish communal life has evolved and developed in East-Central Europe since the collapse of communism. This particular report focuses on Hungary; the other three reports, scheduled to be published over the course of 2011 and 2012, will look at Jewish life in Poland, the Ukraine and Germany.

The project has its origins in two organizations: the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) and the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe (RFHE). JPR, a London-based research institute, consultancy and think-tank that specializes in contemporary Jewish affairs, has stood at the forefront of Jewish community research in the UK for several decades. Its work focuses primarily on Jews in Britain, but the Institute has a longstanding interest in Jewish life throughout Europe, and its publications include *Jewish Restitution and Compensation Claims in Eastern Europe and the Former USSR* (1993), *A new Jewish identity for post-1989 Europe* (1996), *Mapping Jewish culture in Europe today: a pilot project* (2002), *Jews and Jewry in contemporary Hungary: results of a sociological survey* (2004), and *Voices for the Res Publica: The common good in Europe* (2006-09). JPR has also had a longstanding interest in Jewish culture in Europe, and was a co-founder of the European Association for Jewish Culture, with which it retains close ties.

RFHE is a key funder of contemporary Jewish activity across Europe, and has supported a range of educational, cultural, heritage and community-based initiatives in over forty European countries

during the past decade. The Rothschild family has a long tradition of philanthropy going back to the eighteenth century, and from the very beginning, it has been concerned with ensuring equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups across Europe, health care, housing and education. Today, under its Chairman Sir Victor Blank and Executive Director Sally Berkovic, the focus of its activities is academic Jewish studies and Jewish heritage.

Both organizations – JPR and RFHE – had reached the conclusion independently of one another that the time was ripe for a review of East-Central European Jewish life, and over the course of several discussions, elected to partner on this project. Our shared purpose is to paint a series of portraits of Jewish life in different countries within the region in order to allow both community insiders and outsiders to reflect on each community's achievements, challenges and priorities. JPR developed the initial project proposal which, in turn, was shaped and finessed by RFHE. Throughout the process, JPR has taken full responsibility for research matters, and RFHE has provided funding and been a consistent source of advice and support. I am particularly grateful to my colleagues at JPR, Lena Stanley-Clamp and Judith Russell, for their help with the project: Lena Stanley-Clamp has served with distinction as project director throughout the course of the initiative. Judith Russell has been centrally involved in the final stages of translation, editing and production.

In recruiting researchers to undertake the work, we looked for individuals with excellent qualitative research credentials, experience in the field, and the capacity to understand and analyze the particular idiosyncracies of Jewish life in a sophisticated, independent and sensitive manner. In the particular case of Hungary, we recruited Professor András Kovács of the Central European University in Budapest, who is undoubtedly the leading scholar of contemporary Hungarian Jewry in the world today. Professor Kovács is a sociologist who, throughout his distinguished career, has held teaching and research positions at universities and academic institutes in Hungary, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria and the United States. His research interests include

minority identities, prejudice, antisemitism, and the sociology of post-Holocaust Jewry, and he has published over ninety scholarly works, including: *Antisemitism and the Young Elite in Hungary* (1996), *Antisemitic Prejudices in Contemporary Hungary* (1999), *Jews and Jewry in Contemporary Hungary: Results of a Sociological Survey* (ed., 2004), *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond* (co-editor, 2003), *Neutrality and National Identity: the Case of Austria and Hungary* (co-editor, 2003) and, most recently, *The Stranger at Hand: Antisemitic prejudices in post-communist Hungary* (Brill, Boston-Leiden, 2011).

Professor Kovács was assisted in the research by Aletta Forrás-Biró. Aletta Forrás-Biró is assistant professor at the School of Psychology and Education of the Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest), and a psychologist specializing in educational psychology.

Professor Kovacs and Aletta Forrás-Biró, along with the researchers involved in the other country reports in this series, were asked to address four key questions:

- i What were the major milestones and developments over the past twenty years in the community?
- ii Which philanthropic investments (local, national, regional or pan-European) over the same period are notable, either because of the significant impact they have had, or because they failed to achieve their desired outcome?
- iii What are the central challenges facing the community today?
- iv What initiatives and investments are most needed in order to strengthen the community in the future on the local, national, regional and pan-European level?

The researchers were further asked to examine each question with reference to the most pertinent areas of Jewish life, namely:

- Jewish religious life;
- Jewish education (formal and informal);
- Jewish cultural development;
- academic Jewish studies;

- preservation of Jewish heritage;
- young adult (18-30) engagement;
- leadership development;
- innovation and social entrepreneurship;
- funding and philanthropy;
- welfare (children and the elderly);
- combating antisemitism;
- Israel education, advocacy and *aliyah* (emigration to Israel).

Finally, the researchers were asked to bring into their analysis any existing demographic data, any relevant social issues within the community, and the broader political context considered necessary to help the reader to best understand the community.

The research for the Hungary report was conducted between May and December 2010. Qualitative methods were used: fourteen one-to-one interviews and one focus group discussion were carried out, lasting for between one and three hours. In order to be eligible, interviewees needed to hold a significant role in Jewish institutional and community life, have knowledge of several of the central issues listed above, and be, in the view of the researchers, highly likely to remain decision-makers in Jewish communal life for the foreseeable future. In the analysis, we have sought to represent the fundamental viewpoints and differences of opinion we heard, as well as the suggestions for alternative ways forward which were proposed by the interviewees. The inclusion of the numerous quotations that punctuate the report should not be misinterpreted as our endorsement of any particular views, but rather simply as illustrations of perspectives we believed worthy of inclusion in a report like this. Whilst it might have added insight to attribute each quotation to a particular source, we deliberately kept all of them anonymous in order to allow respondents greater freedom to speak openly and with candour. We hope and believe that the result of our work is a rich and insightful portrait of Hungarian Jewish life that captures multiple perspectives, but nevertheless points to a clear set of recommendations concerning how the contemporary community might best respond to the wide range of challenges it faces.

Together with the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe, we hope that this report, alongside the others in the series, will provide a guide to all those wishing to understand, develop or invest in the future of European Jewish life. It is aimed at community development professionals, national and international donors and foundations, community leaders, researchers, academics, and ultimately, the communities themselves. We plan to disseminate the reports widely in order to

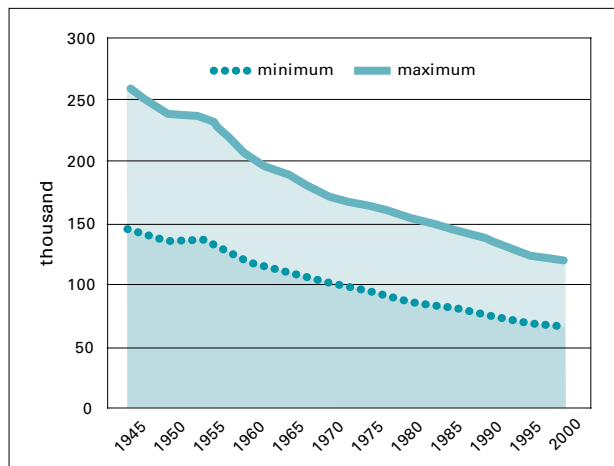
raise awareness of the issues that exist, and our hope and intention is that all of the reports in the series will serve to help all supportive and interested parties to discover new and thoughtful insights about each community, develop new and creative policy ideas for each community, and ultimately, make new and effective investments in each community.

Jonathan Boyd
Executive Director, JPR

1 Basic data on Hungarian Jews and Hungarian Jewish organizations

According to demographic estimates, there are between 80,000 and 150,000 people who have at least one Jewish parent in Hungary today. Using the broader definition of people with at least one Jewish grandparent, survey data indicate that the figure rises to 160,000 adults (over 18 year-olds), and increases still further when under-18s are added. However, as Figure 1 demonstrates, these data represent a significant decline since the end of Second World War, and also point to one of the major issues in contemporary Hungarian Jewish life – the *halachic* status of the Jewish population (i.e. whether individuals are considered Jewish under the terms of Jewish law).

Figure 1: Changes in the number of Jews of matrilineal descent in Hungary (1945-2000)



In terms of social status, today's Hungarian Jewish community belongs largely to the highly educated and high-status stratum of Hungarian society: 46 per cent hold a university or college degree, which is twenty per cent higher than among the general population of Budapest. The percentage of those with university or college degrees is highest (72 per cent) among the forty to sixty age cohort. The professional choices and consumption habits of the Jewish population correspond to their high level of education: a large number can be classified as belonging to the upper middle class. Approximately 90 per cent of the country's Jews live in the capital, Budapest. Jews comprise approximately five per cent of the population of the city, which has nearly two million inhabitants.

The effects of Nazism and communism

In 1941, when the last census before the Holocaust was carried out, there were 400,000 Jews “of the Israelite persuasion,” as well as between 50,000 and 90,000 ‘baptized Jews,’ living in the territory that constitutes Hungary today.¹ Much of that community was murdered during the Holocaust: the losses suffered within the territory of today's Hungary are estimated at between 210,000 and 300,000 people; within the 1944 borders of Hungary, the number is estimated to have been approximately half a million. However, between 190,000 and 260,000 Hungarian Jews survived. Those living in the Hungarian provinces were almost entirely annihilated; the vast majority of the survivors – some 144,000 people – lived in Budapest. According to estimates, one-third of all survivors from Hungary were baptized Jews.

Following the war, the Jewish population continued to diminish due to emigration and intermarriage, as well as low birth rates caused by the death of spouses, ageing and the material and psychological consequences of persecution. During the two waves of emigration that took place from 1945-1948 and 1956-1957, approximately 60,000 to 75,000 Jews left the country.

In the first period of the communist dictatorship (1949-1956), Jewish religious life became significantly restricted. Immediately after the war, 258 Jewish communities were re-established in Hungary, but by the early 1950s, only a quarter of these were still functioning. In February 1950, under pressure from the Communist Government, representatives of the Israelite National Assembly² adopted a resolution establishing a united national organization, bringing to an end the independence

- 1 ‘Baptized Jews’ are individuals born Jewish, who subsequently converted to Christianity. This was a particularly common practice during the inter-war years when high levels of antisemitism and anti-Jewish legislation caused many Jews to change their religious status.
- 2 At the time, the Israelite National Assembly was the highest decision-making body in the community.

of the Autonomous Orthodox Central Office.³ By 1957, appointments to leadership positions in the Jewish community and the rabbinate required formal approval by the state authorities.

During the communist regime some communal institutions – one hospital, one orphanage, and one old age home – were allowed to continue to function, and the production of kosher food was also permitted. However, the anti-religious measures taken by the dictatorship resulted in the dissolution of the Jewish educational system. Seventeen Jewish elementary schools, seven high schools and the teachers' seminary – all of which had reopened after the war – were nationalized. The authorities gave permission for one grammar school and the National Rabbinical Seminary to function, albeit under close government supervision. Even at the single grammar school (based in Budapest), the number of students diminished dramatically: in the 1959-1960 school year, seventy-five students graduated; the figures continued to decrease from 1967, and ten years later, in 1977, the school had only seven students.⁴ After 1948, any independent Jewish cultural institutions were also closed down. The Jewish community was permitted to publish one bi-monthly, *Új Élet* (New Life), which was only allowed to discuss religious matters, and which served to promote the official party line.

In the last years of the old regime, Jewish life started to become more vibrant. The first secular Jewish institution to be established outside the community framework was the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association (MAZSIKE). Set up in 1988, its main objective was the preservation of Jewish Hungarian culture and the invigoration of secular Jewish life. Its membership of several thousand included many Jews who had not been open about their Jewish identity before 1989.

- 3 The Orthodox Jewish community had existed as an independent entity up to this point, but under pressure from the Communist Government, was forced to join the united national Jewish organization.
- 4 As Jews began to feel slightly more confident in light of economic reform and limited political liberalization in the country, the numbers did begin to increase again in the 1980s, although they remained a long way short of their pre-communist regime levels. By 1986, the student numbers rose to above thirty again.

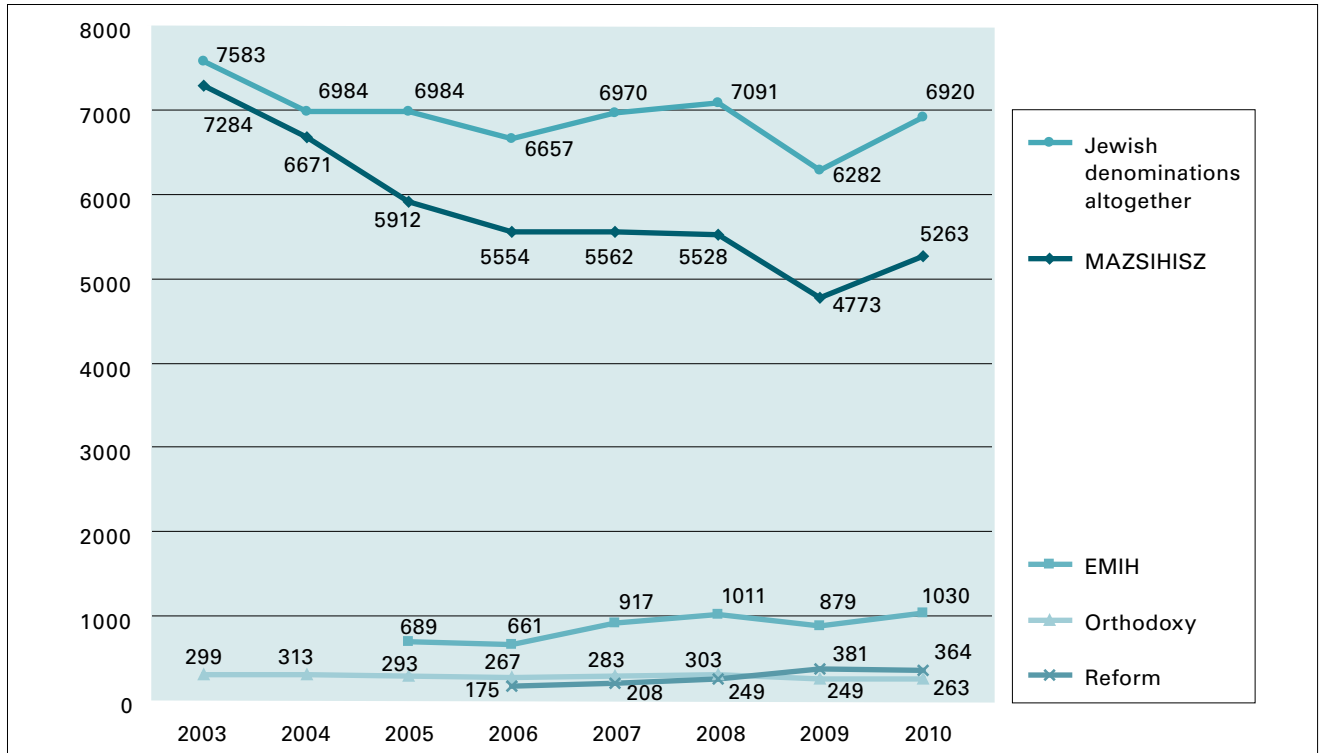
However, the communist era had taken a heavy toll. In 1992, according to the estimates of communal leaders and based on the number of members paying a voluntary tithe to the Budapest Jewish Community (3,800 families), between a quarter and a fifth of all Jews belonged to a community institution at the time. As a consequence of secularization, assimilation and the anti-religious policies of the communist regime, the number of Jews who are affiliated to a religious or cultural institution today is relatively small. It is possible to develop a reasonably accurate picture of Jewish affiliation levels by examining data from two separate sources: the 2001 Census and 'denominational' tax donation figures.⁵ Based on these data, not more than 10% of the Jewish population is affiliated to a Jewish organization. The data also demonstrate that affiliation levels are stronger in the older generation: the average age of those who claim to be Jewish is 53 years, whereas the average age of the general population is 39.2 years.

The revival of Jewish life

Nevertheless, Jewish life was very much reinvigorated with the fall of communism, and more and more Jews began to show an interest in Jewish religion, tradition and culture. A genuine Jewish renaissance seemed to be taking place in the country. Numerous religious, cultural and Zionist organizations were set up or revived. Local Jewish communities were re-established in several provincial towns. Perhaps most significantly, MAZSIHISZ (the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities) was established in 1991 as the representative body of Hungarian Jewry. Whilst both the Neolog (a progressive branch of Judaism roughly equivalent to the American Conservative movement) and the Orthodox communities became members of the elected bodies of the MAZSIHISZ, each preserved its

- 5 In Hungary citizens may donate one per cent of their taxes to a religious community of their choice. The 2001 Census included an optional question concerning religious or ethnic affiliation, and 12,871 people responded by identifying themselves as Jewish. Of these, 9,468 were living in Budapest. Denominational tax donation figures from 2010 (see figure 2 below) further demonstrate that 6,920 people made a tax donation to a Jewish denomination. It is reasonable to assume that in both instances the Jews appearing in the statistics are those with the strongest identity, and this is also likely to manifest itself in organizational affiliation.

Figure 2: Number of donors per Jewish denomination



own leadership, rabbinate and administration. However, Orthodoxy only remained a branch of the MAZSIHISZ until 1994, when the Hungarian Autonomous Orthodox Israelite Community became independent again.⁶ MAZSIHISZ, now an exclusively Neolog body, nevertheless remained the representative body, and continued to be the key Jewish recipient of government subsidies, and thus the controller of most Jewish communal funds. In the early 1990s, Chabad Lubavitch also appeared on the scene in Hungary; subsequently, the first Reform communities, Sim Shalom and Bet Orim, were established. Chabad also revived the Hungarian Jewish movement formerly known as ‘Status Quo Ante’ – i.e. not accepting the Orthodox-Neolog schism – under the name of the Unified Hungarian Israelite Community (EMIH) in 2004.

Today, forty-two Neolog synagogue districts operate throughout the country, fourteen of which are in Budapest. In addition, there are three synagogues run by Chabad, two Reform communities, and a Modern Orthodox

community, all in Budapest, and all working outside the framework of the MAZSIHISZ. However, in attempting to assess the degree of influence of each of the religious movements, as well as changes in their relative influence over time, it is important to examine data on the number of Jews choosing to donate one per cent of their income tax to their particular Jewish denomination (see Figure 2).

In addition to government subsidies, the Jewish organizations working under the auspices of the MAZSIHISZ are also supported via restitution funds. After 1990, the Hungarian Parliament passed a number of laws regulating individual and collective compensation for those who had suffered persecution. Approximately 30,000 of the Jews persecuted after 1939 – or their close relatives – received compensation. The compensation of the Jewish community as a whole was prescribed by the law regulating the status of confiscated properties formerly owned by religious communities. According to this legislation, religious communities, including the Jewish community, could reclaim confiscated properties if they wished to put them to use again. In addition, the MAZSIHISZ receives a fixed annual allowance for properties for which it did

6 Orthodoxy continues to receive funding from MAZSIHISZ, but since 1994 is free to distribute these funds according to its own criteria.

not reclaim. The government has undertaken to contribute to the maintenance of the more than 1,000 abandoned Jewish cemeteries. As prescribed by the law about the collective compensation of the Jewish community, an organization called MAZSÖK (Jewish Heritage of Hungary Public Endowment) was set up. It receives from the state approximately 0.1 per cent of the wealth which was formerly owned by Jews without heirs and left behind after the Holocaust. This foundation provides annuities for all those Jews currently living in Hungary who were born before the end of the war (9 May 1945) and applied for the support (currently approximately 10,000 people) as well as subsidies for community projects. These subsidies are available to organizations outside the MAZSIHISZ, as long as their application is accepted by the board of trustees of the foundation.

Following the fall of communism in 1989, a host of new Jewish educational institutions also sprang into existence. Maintained by the MAZSIHISZ, the former Jewish grammar school was expanded and continues today under the name of Scheiber Sándor Grammar and Elementary School. 1990 saw the opening of the Orthodox American Endowment School, established by the Reichmann Foundation and offering a traditional Orthodox Jewish education. The more liberal Lauder Javne Jewish Community School and Nursery was opened in 1990; its tuition fees are considered high by Hungarian standards. Chabad Lubavitch has also established its own educational institutions: a kindergarten, a school and a *yeshiva*. Taken as a whole, these Jewish schools (of which Lauder is the largest with approximately 600 students), have about 1,000 students in total. The National Rabbinical Seminary was also expanded to include the new Jewish University, and given the name OR-ZSE (National Rabbinical Seminary-Jewish University). It trains rabbis, teachers and social workers, offers a BA in Jewish Studies, and has between 200 to 300 students in total. Other important institutions include the Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives, which functions under the auspices of the MAZSIHISZ, and the HDKE (Holocaust Education Centre and Memorial Collection), a state-funded institution governed by a board of trustees independent of the MAZSIHISZ, that opened in 2004 and serves as a centre for Holocaust research and education.

Several Jewish youth movements came into being after the collapse of communism, partly through the re-establishment of old organizations that had existed before the communist regime, and partly through the creation of local branches of foreign – mainly Zionist – organizations. In recent years, seven such organizations have been active, all of them in Budapest: four youth movements – Bnei Akiva, Habonim-Dror, Hanoar Hatzioni, Hashomer Hatzair, and three student/young adult organizations – Kidma, Marom and UJS (Hungarian Union of Jewish Youth).

In 1989, the Hungarian Zionist Federation was similarly re-established to serve as an umbrella organization for various religious and secular Zionist organizations. Its member organizations are essentially comprised of the Zionist youth movements. The March of the Living Foundation also functions in Hungary, and organizes a large event for several thousand participants each year on the day of the March of the Living, in which both Jews and non-Jews participate.

After 1989, the number of Jewish publications also underwent a rapid increase. *Új Élet* (New Life), the bi-monthly magazine of the MAZSIHISZ, reports primarily on Jewish life, community events and religious matters. *Szombat* (Sabbath) is published by the MAZSIKE (Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association) ten times a year, and discusses Jewish life from a social, political and cultural angle, devoting a separate column to Israel. 1989 saw the re-launch of *Múlt és Jövő* (Past and Future), a literary and art magazine which had existed from 1911 until the Second World War. In addition to these three main periodicals, numerous smaller publications also exist, including *Egység* (Unity), the newspaper of Chabad Lubavitch, and *Erec* (Eretz), a publication of the Hungarian Zionist Federation and the Sochnut (Jewish Agency). There are several Jewish publishing houses (for example, Makkabi and *Múlt és Jövő*), and other publishers have also produced many books over the course of the past decade in the fields of Jewish history, literature and religion.

1994 saw the opening of the Bálint Jewish Community Centre in a building restituted to the Jewish community. The centre primarily runs social and cultural activities, mostly funded by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). It also serves as a home for

a number of social organizations and youth movements, and operates as the centre for organizing the international Jewish youth camp at Szarvas.

The two most important institutions of heritage conservation, the Jewish Museum and the Jewish Archives, both operate under the auspices of MAZSIHISZ. The Jewish Museum has a permanent Judaica exhibition open to the general public, as well as temporary exhibits. The task of the Jewish Archives is to collect and preserve all documents relating to Hungarian Jewry.

New welfare initiatives also began to develop post-1989. Today, the MAZSIHISZ maintains a large number of welfare institutions, including a hospital, two elderly care homes and a soup kitchen, in addition to running seniors' clubs in several synagogues. Orthodoxy also has its own elderly care home. The bulk of social care tasks is undertaken by the JDC and the Hungarian Jewish Social Aid Foundation (MAZS), which itself was established by the JDC. These institutions focus mainly on providing care for the elderly and for Holocaust survivors, but have recently also launched child and family support projects.

In the years since the collapse of communism, the Hungarian Jewish community has not been without its points of controversy. In autumn 2005, a small group of Jewish activists proposed that the Jews of Hungary – just like thirteen other ethnic groups living in the country – ought to be granted

the status of an ethnic minority. The minority legislation, passed in 1993, states that a group defined by law as a minority is entitled to certain collective cultural and representative rights. These rights are exercised on behalf of the minority by its elected representative body. The initiative was first rejected by the MAZSIHISZ, and several Jewish public figures and intellectuals similarly opposed it, claiming that there was no precedent for the Hungarian Jewish community to define itself as a national minority. Their chief concern was that the plan would result in 'the separation of Jews from Hungarians'. In the end, the legal procedure could not be initiated anyway, because advocates of the proposal were unable to get the 1,000 signatures required to support it.

Three years later, in 2008, following long debates about Jewish representation, and in response to accusations that they were monopolizing control, the MAZSIHISZ established a new umbrella organization under the name of the Hungarian Jewish Congress. The Congress accepts as a member any Jewish organization, including those not belonging to the MAZSIHISZ. However, it is only able to serve in an advisory capacity and it is unable to pass resolutions on matters concerning the Jewish community as a whole. Furthermore, it has no say in the distribution of state subsidies and other funds coming in to the budget of MAZSIHISZ. As a result, Chabad, the Reform communities and Marom announced at the very creation of the Congress that they did not wish to participate in it.

2 Major achievements and milestones over the past twenty years

Looking back over the past twenty years, some of the most important achievements and milestones in the development of the Hungarian Jewish community have been:

- The creation of a communal infrastructure:** This consists of both the religious institutional framework and the range of welfare and cultural institutions, including old age homes, a hospital, the Jewish Museum and the Jewish Archives, all of which function under the auspices of the MAZSIHISZ. Indeed, today, the MAZSIHISZ ensures the functioning of all the basic social services.
- The signing of key contracts with the Hungarian state:** Two have been signed – one concerning compensation for community possessions, and the other concerning compensation for persecution. The state has also subsidized the Holocaust Memorial Centre (established in 2004), and, in 1999, the government introduced an annual Holocaust Memorial Day into schools.
- The creation of a broad Jewish educational infrastructure:** Jewish educational institutions have been established across the full spectrum, from nurseries, through primary schools, to the Jewish University. Today the Jewish educational framework, some of which belongs to the MAZSIHISZ and some of which is independent, has more than ten times as many students as it did in the late 1980s.
- The establishment of links with international Jewish organizations:** In particular, connections have been built with Israel which have allowed Hungarian Jews to become familiar with Israeli institutions, culture and everyday life. These links have contributed significantly to the development of Jewish pluralism and Jewish civil society in Hungary. For the younger generation, visits to Israel through Birthright, MASA and other exchange programmes are not uncommon. Most recently, the Israeli Cultural Institute was opened in Budapest in 2010.
- An upsurge of Jewish life outside the official Jewish institutional framework:** In particular, several major formal and informal educational institutions have been built, including the Lauder Javne Nursery School, Primary School, Secondary School and Vocational School, the American Endowment School and the Szarvas International Youth Camp.
- The emergence of multiple Jewish religious alternatives:** In addition to the continued existence of Hungary's Jewish Neolog and Orthodox communities, two international religious movements have also appeared on the Jewish religious scene – Chabad and Reform.
- The development, and changing nature, of an infrastructure for Jewish youth:** From the early 1990s, several Zionist youth movements were established in Hungary. However, from the second half of the 1990s, the activities of these youth movements began to undergo a major transformation, with the appearance of alternative organizations such as Marom and Haver, with their broader educational, cultural and social goals. Judapest, a Jewish blog that was published from 2004 to 2009 and that operated independently of any organizations, engaged a relatively large number of young Jewish people in the community and may be likened to many of the innovative young Jewish initiatives to have emerged at a similar time in other parts of the Jewish world. As is the case elsewhere, younger generations tend to express their Jewish identity less in relation to the Holocaust, and rather more through positive religious and cultural means.
- The development of new tools for the promotion of Jewish culture:** From the moment it was established in 1988, the MAZSIKE (Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association) set as its goal the renewal of Jewish culture. As the first independent Jewish organization, which quickly gained several thousand members after its establishment, it began publishing its journal, *Szombat*, in

1990. *Szombat* has become one of the most important independent forums of Hungarian Jewish life, and comes out ten times per annum. Several Jewish publishing houses and cultural magazines have also been established, the most important being *Múlt és Jövő*.

- **The creation of a centre for Jewish culture:** Bálint Ház, the Jewish Cultural Centre of Budapest, opened in 1994, and runs its own cultural, educational and social programmes in addition to offering space for a diverse range of Jewish initiatives.

3 Major philanthropic investments over the past twenty years

In order to achieve all of these developments, it has, of course, been necessary to find and cultivate various sources of funding. Most of the larger investment projects within the Jewish institutional framework have taken place under the auspices of the MAZSIHISZ. The cost of these projects was covered by community funds, with money coming from the state budget and from compensation. Some private individuals, for example Tony Curtis, the Hungarian-born American actor, contributed to projects such as the renovation of the great synagogue in Dohány Street, through the Emanuel Foundation.

The Hungarian Jewish Social Aid Foundation (MAZS) was established in 1991 by the Hungarian office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) to co-ordinate social benefits. A large part of the resources of the Foundation is provided by JDC and the Claims Conference, but special projects, for example its child welfare project, have also been sponsored by private American individuals. The Orthodox hospice received a major donation from the Herling family to cover its running costs.

The establishment of the Bálint Ház (JCC), which opened its doors in 1994, was made possible by the donation of the Bálint family in the United Kingdom. Most of the running costs of the JCC are covered by the JDC. The costs of the Szarvas Camp are also paid for by the JDC, as well as

by the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation. It was also the Lauder Foundation which established the Lauder Javne School on a piece of land donated by the city council of Budapest, and which covers approximately one third of the school's running costs. The Orthodox American Endowment School was founded by the Reichmann family from Canada. German foundations have contributed large sums to the restoration of the Rabbinical Seminary and its library. The founding and operation of the Israeli Cultural Institute were made possible by major donations from various private individuals; the largest donations were given by Israeli businessmen based in Hungary.

The three synagogues owned by Chabad – those in Vasvári Pál Street, Károly Boulevard and in Óbuda – have been restored, and their operational costs covered, with sizeable donations coming from non-government resources. The Óbuda synagogue functions under the name of EMIH (the Unified Hungarian Israelite Community).

Apart from these major donors, a number of philanthropic foundations and private individuals also give financial support on a smaller scale to various religious, social, educational and cultural organizations. The most active among these have been the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiy) Europe, the Dutch Jewish Humanitarian Fund, the Pincus Foundation, the Lauder Foundation and the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

4 Jewish community life and its organizations

4.1. Religious institutions and religious life

The Jewish religious scene is comprised of the dominant Neolog movement and the tiny Orthodox community, as well as two relative newcomers – Chabad and Reform – both of which began their activities in Hungary after 1990. In all cases, since the collapse of communism, there has been a significant increase in the number of communities functioning throughout the country. Today, there are forty-two Neolog synagogues in Hungary (fourteen in Budapest, operating under the auspices of the BZSH (“Budapest Jewish Community”), and twenty-eight in the provinces), and four synagogues and prayer houses owned by the Orthodox (all in Budapest). All of these synagogues operate within the MAZSIHISZ framework. In addition, there are three synagogues run by Chabad, two Reform communities and a Modern Orthodox community in Budapest, functioning outside of the MAZSIHISZ framework.

Despite the fact that there are more synagogues outside of Budapest than within the city, the provincial communities are all very small, and, according to at least one interviewee, their future looks rather bleak:

“You can count on one hand the larger communities of the provinces: they’re all in county seats such as Pécs, Szeged, Debrecen or Miskolc. A few smaller communities still exist, for example the one in Hódmezővásárhely. I don’t know exactly how many members it has, but my guess is 50 to 100, or perhaps 150 Jews. There is a synagogue, there is a community, they pray once a week on Friday nights. These communities are dying out. There is, of course, always the odd fanatic who will look after the graves, keep in touch with the local council and maintain the prayer house. But a real community depends on the involvement of the local Israeli university students – and they are not necessarily in contact with the Jewish community in Szeged or in Debrecen. They go during the High Holy Days. I think it will be all over within ten or twenty years.”

Nevertheless, in the years immediately following 1990, a religious revival appeared to be taking place in Budapest, at least. Those who had been wary of the problems faced by religious Jews during the communist years, as well as those who wanted to return to a more meaningful Judaism after the collapse of communism, began to reappear in synagogues. However, several respondents argued that the MAZSIHISZ made a strategic error in the early years by failing to take on a liberal outlook, which might have helped to draw many more people in, and according to at least one of our interviewees, the initial revival trend subsided as quickly as it appeared:

Following full religious ‘liberation,’ it immediately became clear that over the previous decades, the religious Jews of Hungary had practically died out, partly due to their age, and partly because of the Orthodox Jewish emigration in and after 1956, which ended by the early 1960s at the latest. This practically led to the extinction of Hungarian Orthodoxy. [Today] there are two or three families ‘playing Orthodox’ to the end, but their synagogues and prayer houses are, in effect, just as empty as those of the Neologs. To be more precise, theirs are not empty because they are visited by American tourists. Nominally, Orthodoxy still exists and has recovered its independent, autonomous status, but this doesn’t mean that it really exists. The Neolog community does exist in a modified form, but the changes in state policy have been both positive and negative... the excuses of the past, when one could say that things were hindered by the oppressive state [can no longer be used].

The religious denominations

However, significant efforts are being made within each of the denominations. For example, amongst the activities and facilities offered by one of the Neolog synagogues are a *Talmud Torah* for children, a newspaper, family events and adult education programmes. In addition, the synagogue has a website and presence on both Facebook and Iwiw (a similar Hungarian social networking site). A respondent familiar with this work reported:

“At the very beginning, there was the regular Sunday Talmud Torah for the children, completely independent of synagogue life. Then we tried to bring this closer to the synagogue. Now we have the Talmud Torah on Friday nights; once they’re here anyway, they’ll come in to the synagogue. There were younger and younger kids coming, from age 3 and over. So we also brought down the level of the curriculum, or the games, or our attitude. At one point we had lots of families who didn’t want to come regularly, but they did want to come once a month. Then we started to have family events, 100 to 120 people turned up at these events, especially around the festivals. Now we have children’s programmes in two age groups. We also have a crèche, we don’t send the kids out of the synagogue service, they never disturb anyone. If they want to take some time out, they have the kids’ corner and the playroom. In another room there’s proper learning for the older ones. And family events create some sort of a community.

“There are [other] places where young people are being paid to attend and to learn. I try to fight this as much as I can, because I don’t think the way to get people to turn up on a Friday night is by offering them a bowl of cooked food. Of course, we are socially sensitive, and a lot of people who come here will be given cake and challah, but this is not a priority. We don’t have daily services, only on Mondays and Thursdays... There are synagogues where they ensure the morning ‘minyan’ by paying six or seven out of the ten people to turn up for the service. I don’t want a ‘minyan’ like that. I want them to come out of conviction and because they want to. We have no problems with Friday nights or Sabbath morning services; many people come, both men and women. And they also come during festivals. What’s more, they are familiar with more and more festivals now and don’t just turn up on Rosh Hashanah [the Jewish New Year] or, Yom Kippur [Day of Atonement] or Seder [Passover] night.”

A leading representative of the Neolog denomination similarly reported that one of the major Neolog synagogues in Budapest runs services twice a day that attract fifty people, and approximately 100-200 people on Shabbat. However, the same respondent was nevertheless rather critical of these numbers, as the synagogue exists in a district with a population of 15,000 to 30,000 Jews. Furthermore:

“The Hungarian Neolog is slowly beginning to lose its character. The vast majority of rabbis in Hungary today are not Neolog by conviction, although they are by salary. They are Jews who work as rabbis in the Neolog community because they are not accepted by the Orthodox as truly observant and Orthodox Jewish rabbis. Thus, due to their constant pangs of guilt, they try to turn the Neolog traditions slightly back toward the traditions of Orthodoxy. This is just the opposite of what the great Neolog rabbis of the twentieth century strove to do. And the community votes with its feet. One of the synagogues in Budapest has practically lost all of its constituency because the rabbi there is strictly observant of every religious law... According to the authentic Neolog understanding, the community as a whole should indeed observe the rules of the Shulchan Aruch [the code of Jewish law], but [Neolog leaders] turn a blind eye when individuals don’t really keep these.”

Beyond these two denominations, the religious map of Hungarian Jewry has been greatly transformed since the appearance of Chabad Lubavitch in 1989. Chabad is independent of the MAZSIHISZ and operates outside its framework. It claims to have reached out to several tens of thousands of people through its religious and cultural programming, although this number is questioned by all sources independent of Chabad. Its philosophy is unashamedly religious in nature, and it is highly sceptical of the long-term impact of more cultural versions of Judaism. A Budapest-based rabbi associated with Chabad evaluates the situation in the following way:

“... in reality it is not really possible to provide a [Jewish] alternative on purely cultural grounds, because Jewish culture, as such, does not offer an identity-forming content that is distinct from religious traditions or values. Judaism in itself is a very complex thing. But one thing is certain: everything leads back to the religion. The nation, the people, the history, the language, modern Israel and the culture all take one back to the religion on some level. And therefore, I am convinced that a real alternative can only be provided by religion. I’m not talking about... a community in the traditional sense where every member is a hundred per cent observant. Rather, a community that represents and transmits religious values. Then everything else can be built on top of this:

cultural life, relationship with Israel, Hebrew language and the like. Mind you, there's quite a big difference between the religious values represented by Chabad or EMIH and those of the Reform, but it's definitely this [i.e. religion] that provides the solid basis for a permanent community life, on top of which you can then add all the cultural elements, which are undoubtedly very important. In my opinion, from the point of view of structure, the establishment of our denomination was a major turning point. Until then, there was no other registered Jewish denomination [outside of the Neolog MAZSIHISZ], though it's true that Orthodoxy was registered as a denomination but only as a part of the MAZSIHISZ. It was an important turning point because it proved to everyone that there were alternatives... [and] in recent years we have seen that things that have a legitimacy have gained strength. It is very hard to determine what can be considered a part of Jewish life and what are the things that are already something else... For example, to what extent you can consider these 'ruin pubs' [pubs in courtyards of old damaged houses, several of which function as meeting places for a subculture of young Jews in Budapest] a part of Jewish life is questionable, but I do believe that they also belong to the bubble. So, there are things that are working and that are important. I think these are seeds that have been sown, so I'm optimistic in this respect."

Chabad's primary strategy in Hungary, as in other parts of the world, is to bring religious life and social events together: its *Bar Mitzvah* club, discussed in more detail in section 4.2 below, works on this principle, as do its communal learning activities and Friday night prayer services:

"The Friday night service is not just a prayer service. The young people don't necessarily turn up because they're deeply religious. Far more likely, they come because it's followed by a communal meal and they can meet new people, etc. This is also very important because it becomes a communal experience."

The organization feels compelled to work in this way for a variety of reasons, not least that it is highly critical of the Jewish organizational infrastructure that presently exists:

"The present system reflects a way of thinking that was left over from socialism. The perpetual

annuity, and the fact that this money is distributed by the state, stifles the activity of the communities to some extent and the participants of civil society. Or rather, it doesn't allow initiatives that have real legitimacy and are really wanted by the community today to come to the fore and gather strength... If you ask someone for a donation for a Jewish cause, that person will think, why should I give to a Jewish cause when the state provides funding for Jewish things anyway? I dare say it might be better if there was no state funding whatsoever. Those parasites who are steering the present situation in the wrong direction and are taking advantage of the situation would disappear. At the same time, initiatives with a genuine value could come to the fore so there would be an improvement in quality, and this would then lead to a growth in quantity as well. I think that in this sense our community is outstanding, as 90 per cent of our maintenance costs is covered by donations."

Nevertheless, in 2004, Chabad created the Unified Hungarian Israelite Community (EMIH), which it hopes to have recognized as the successor of the 'Status Quo Ante,' a movement that, to all intents and purposes, ceased to exist years ago. Its primary objective in seeking to become regarded as the contemporary representatives of this historic Hungarian Jewish denomination is to improve its chances in the competition for state resources. However, to date, both Chabad and EMIH sustain themselves through private donations and grants, without any state funding.

The emergence and extraordinary activity of Chabad have certainly forced the Hungarian Jewish community to respond. Many different perspectives exist, ranging from total acceptance, through a sense of threat, to total rejection. One particularly critical respondent said:

"I consider the presence of Chabad a tremendous threat because it's an organization that strives for totalitarian power and lacks any openness to accommodate other voices. It has no moral restraints and is, therefore, able to manipulate a lot of people. What it really means by 'love of every Jew' is 'I want every Jew to be like me'. It has a model of Jewishness and it wishes to assimilate into this one model a Jewry which is made up of communities of a variety of colours. It has no moral scruples about making any alliances. It is excellent

at communication and marketing. It also does a lot of great things, but all this in the interest of a total takeover in the countries of Europe.”

A Neolog respondent argued:

“In my view we are undergoing a colonization process, where Chabad sees Hungarian Jewry as the aboriginals doomed for extinction.... Of course, this is meant not in a physical but a spiritual sense. Chabad thinks there is only one true way, and it is its way. I think that Hungarian Jewry has its own tradition which go back roughly two, maybe three hundred years, to the time when Jews returned to Hungary, and Ashkenazi Jewish communities began to build themselves up again here. What Chabad represents has nothing to do with us, apart from the fact that we’re, of course, all members of the same religion and the same people. What it wants to build up here is an altogether different story, a different tradition... Following the first moment of amazement and joy that people felt over the fact that some very knowledgeable and extremely enthusiastic people had appeared on the scene, everyone quickly realized that, in reality, they were very far from our way of thinking. If we look at the numbers, they clearly show that they have been unable to mobilize the masses. If, say, we take a look at the tax donations of 1%, they can’t achieve more than roughly 1,000. Their synagogue in Vasvári Pál Street has maybe twenty or thirty people on a daily basis. And at their synagogue in Károly Boulevard there is no ‘minyan.’ They have lured away some of the members of the already existing religious community in Budapest, and they have some people from abroad. Their claim to have managed to attract large masses who had had no prior connection to Judaism, unfortunately doesn’t seem to be justified... I don’t see that they have made a major breakthrough.”

Beyond Chabad, there are some other smaller communities functioning independently from the MAZSIHISZ. One of these is Pesti Súl, a small Hungarian Orthodox community. In reality, most of the constituents do not lead an Orthodox life, but they want to go to a synagogue that is governed by the norms of Jewish law and has no sanctions against those who are lax in their observance. Our interviewee, who has been an active member of the Súl for a long time, described the limits of such organizations:

“It can sustain itself and preserve its independence as a community of thirty to fifty members, but is unable to offer an alternative to the masses. You can’t do that without a large organization backing you up. Since people do this on a voluntary basis in their free time, with one or two temporary employees at most, such an initiative cannot compete with an organization that has an extensive fundraising network, an international support base, connections, political contacts and an immense thirst for power.”

Reform communities, such as the Szim Salom Progressive Jewish Community which is home to the first female rabbi in Hungary, or the Bet Orim Reform Jewish Community, also function independently. Members of the focus group agreed that what Reform synagogues have on offer is in line with the needs of highly secularized Hungarian Jewry, but despite their clear potential, they have been unable to capitalize on it to date. Our respondents seemed to agree that one of the issues was the fact that Szim Salom has a female rabbi, an issue that has proved to be unacceptable to many Hungarian Jews. One participant further argued that the Hungarian Reform movement lacks spiritual innovation, and strives to establish an exact replica of western Reform in Hungary, instead of trying to adapt it to Hungarian circumstances. Finally, one of our respondents pointed to the organizational problems that Reform synagogues have faced: although a relatively large number of people show some interest, there has been great fluctuation in numbers, and the movement has been unable to retain its membership. One of the interviewees, who is active in the Reform movement, explained this by stating that Reform, as it is today,

“... is a community rather than a religious organization. And communities have their limits; community-building comes to a stop after reaching a certain size.”

Nevertheless, a Neolog respondent, was fundamentally rather more accommodating towards the Reform movement:

“In a sense, the Progressive movements have a bright future in Hungary; they could, if they wanted to, get a lot more involved in Hungarian Jewish life. There is a very, very strong opposition

to them for certain reasons... [but] if the Reform movement is clever, it can have serious potential."

A secular Jewish activist had similarly positive things to say about Reform in many respects:

"The emergence of Reform is certainly important, [not least] to show the existence of alternative paths within the Jewish community. They haven't brought about a breakthrough, nor have they anywhere else in Eastern Europe, but they do an excellent job. They really are a grassroots group who make a real effort, but they can't really reach out to large numbers."

In summary, the essentials of Jewish religious life are fully present and available in Hungary. The chief problem lies in the fact that there are not enough observant Jews, broadly understood, to take advantage of what is available. Furthermore, as may be clear from some of the comments above, the dynamics between the various Jewish denominations are rather complex and, at times, tense. Part of the competitiveness is, of course, related to the fact that the communities operating independently of the MAZSIHISZ have often levelled strong criticism at the historical convention that the MAZSIHISZ is the sole body representing Hungarian Jews to the government. However, in more general terms, the overinflated nature of the Jewish religious institutional framework – and of the institutions attached to the religious communities on an organizational level – was also raised as a central problem during the focus group discussion. Even though a Jewish institutional framework has existed since 1990, due to a rupture in the 'renaissance' that began then, this framework is now rather empty and underused. Furthermore, in many instances it has undergone unnecessary duplications: often a particular movement will create its own school, social welfare institutions and the like out of purely political motives, even though institutions already exist within the system that fulfil similar functions. This phenomenon partly has a sociological cause: there are many non-*halachic* Jews, and some organizations are being replicated because there is disagreement about who can be accepted as a Jew within their institutions. There is no co-operation or co-ordination between the institutions belonging to the different religious movements; rather, competition seems to be prevalent. There is a dire need in the system for

a suitable umbrella organization to reconcile interests and make reasonable compromises.

"The organizations are in competition. There is a lot of jealousy... Everyone is frustrated by the fact that they are cultivating a minority culture which... doesn't really have followers. This is why, instead of creative energies propelling everything forward... there is nasty competition against each other, because they are trying to lure away that small audience from each other. It's all down to competition and this causes, in many cases, an unpleasant atmosphere within the Jewish community. What needs to change is the mentality and there needs to be some co-operation. But talking about co-operation, the organizations probably need to be told that being innovative ought not to be seen as 'we've got to do this quickly now, lest the others do it first and they get the funding.'"

The Jewish status issue

Of course, the Jewish status issue in Hungary should be seen as part of the backdrop to these issues. From the perspective of religious involvement, one of the great challenges has been the large number of individuals who are not *halachically* Jewish (i.e. are not recognized as Jews under Jewish law), but nevertheless have a Jewish identity.⁷ The fact that the Neolog movement has taken an Orthodox turn does not solve the problem, as neither the Orthodox, nor Chabad will accept Neolog conversions. In the words of a representative of the Neologs:

"The Orthodox approach would exclude a large part of the people here in Hungary who feel truly and genuinely Jewish, from the Jewish fold. To give you one example: if someone's great-grandmother underwent a Neolog conversion back in 1912, that person does not count as a Jew today. According to the Israeli and Orthodox view, this person is only a Jew in Hungary. Just imagine such a person, whose great-grandmother was already leading a Jewish life, whose grandmother was deported, whose mother was deported, and this person has lived the life of a committed and observant Jew all their life, and they are told: 'You are not Jewish!'. Well, in Hungary today this is a tremendous problem."

⁷ Surveys have shown that starting with the post-war years, the rate of intermarriage has been around 50 per cent among Hungarian Jews.

But, as I said, it's the same elsewhere in Europe. So, if they are unable to find some solution to this problem, it will lead to the destruction of the entire Jewish community. Of course, certain formalities have to be observed, but the vast majority of converts in Hungary converted under the Neolog rabbinate and consider themselves Neolog, they bring up their children to be Jewish and give them a Jewish education. Still, at some point, large masses of Hungarian Jews may be faced with the fact – and we're not talking about one or two people here but 20, 30 or 40 per cent – that they don't count as Jews. I think it is unnecessary to analyze at great length the psychological and social consequences that this may have.

“In Hungary this has very drastic manifestations. At Chabad, for example, it's a recurring situation: they attract someone who starts working with them, perhaps even donates money, and keeps everything, and then after a while, when things get serious, they send this person away when they realize that from their point of view, he or she is not Jewish. And this person will, of course, say to him or herself, ‘I was born Jewish, and have lived as a Jew for thirty years, so don't try to explain to me now that I'm not really Jewish and that I should convert’.”

The representative of Chabad, however, denies the charge that the movement has been handling the problem in a rigid manner. True, the only solution that they see for people who are not halachically Jewish is conversion – only this would make it possible for them to join the Jewish community. However, the opportunities that they provide for involvement in communal life in a broader sense – learning, participation at events, supporting the community, etc. – are open to others as well.

“These people essentially have two options. One is to convert to Judaism. In my understanding this means that you can't convert to become a non-observant Jew. So, they convert, they decide to be religious Jews, and they observe the rules of ‘halachah’ from A to Z. This, I think, only applies to a smaller group. These people see themselves as part of the community in some sense. In the next twenty years I could also envisage the community including and welcoming people in a broader sense, people who are not necessarily halachically Jewish, or not Jewish at all.”

The emerging generation

In spite of all the challenges, two new developments have managed to somewhat change the face of religious life: the appearance of young rabbis (ordained post-1990) in certain Neolog communities, and the influence of the youth movements.

The new generation of rabbis appears to be interested not only in preserving the continuity of religious life, but also in long-term community-building. They have noticed that in recent years, the young people who, for example, grew up in the Szarvas Camp, have started reappearing in synagogue after having disappeared for a while. These include many young people who had no religious background, but nevertheless consider it important to have a Jewish wedding, for example, and their involvement may be starting to have an impact on the generation of parents who were alienated from the religion in an earlier era. One of the young rabbis said:

“For the majority among them, and they are already the next generation – the children have already been born – it was important to have a ritual circumcision and to have a baby-naming for the girls in the synagogue. So there is some degree of return in this sense. Because of the Holocaust and the communist regime they never had a role model before them that they could follow or seek out. When the kids who grew up in the Szarvas Camp went home, they could recite grace after meals and they knew how to sing. And then at home, grandma, grandpa and the parents suddenly realized that these are indeed familiar things... So now it doesn't happen the way it would in the normal course of life, by parents passing down that inner commitment [to their children]; rather, it's the children who bring the parents back now.”

Another development emerging from the new generation is Moishe House Budapest, an American Jewish initiative that currently runs thirty-one Moishe Houses in the United States and across the Jewish world. The Moishe House Foundation enables small groups of young people to move into shared accommodation, and each local group then organizes events for their peers, thereby creating dynamic and innovative grassroots communities. Moishe House Budapest opened in September 2009, and its residents are members of Marom (see section 4.6 below). They

celebrate festivals together, offer a cookery course, organize film screenings, and run a social action group. In this way, they are attracting young Hungarian Jews (as well as quite a few non-Jews) into Jewish cultural and religious life entirely independently of any of the communal and institutional issues discussed above.

Interestingly, the youth movements – even the most secular ones – are also playing their part in the revival of religious Jewish life. Because involvement in particular Zionist youth movements has tended to be more about general communal identification rather than a particular ideological stance, they have been important players in the development of young people’s Jewish identities:

“In 1989, in Hashomer, when we went abroad to camp, we would light candles on Friday night, which caused astonishment in the international Hashomer. The Hungarian youth organizations that were set up in 1989 were certainly one of the central pillars of religious identity.”

4.2 Jewish education

Formal Jewish education

One of the major developments of the past twenty years has been the establishment of Jewish day schools in Budapest. Three schools were opened twenty years ago: the Orthodox American Endowment School (Wesselényi), which follows Orthodox traditions; the Scheiber Sándor School, under Neolog management; and Lauder Javne, which defines itself as secular. Chabad also opened its own nursery and primary school in the 1990s.

There has been considerable fluctuation in the number of students attending the three large schools over the past twenty years. The most significant changes can be seen in the case of Wesselényi: when it opened, it had 500 students; today it has between forty and sixty. Altogether, approximately 1,000 children attend Jewish schools, which, compared to the overall size of the community, is quite a low figure. There may be several reasons for this: the problematic way in which the middle generation relates to its own Jewishness; the standard of general education in Jewish schools, which is considerably lower than in the best public schools; and the poor state of Jewish studies. According to one strongly critical

view, Hungarian Jewry really needs a single large Jewish school with very high educational standards:

“One has to be realistic and face the fact that there is no need for an Orthodox school in Hungary. What there may be a need for is, perhaps, a really good Jewish school. Currently, the three schools have completely different strengths, and they all have so many drawbacks that families with a certain intellectual standard and Jewish commitment have no choice but not to send their children to Jewish schools. Which means that none of the Jewish schools is acceptable to them, [so they] send their child to a good non-Jewish school instead.”

“Wesselényi is too Orthodox; Scheiber has practically speaking no Jewish curriculum... there is a lot of negative feeling among students... they dislike the Neolog Jewish educational policy... which they think is hypocritical, is not planned thoughtfully, and is incapable of renewing itself. Students, who have now started going to Israel, can see [in the school] that... prayer is not prayer, tradition is not tradition, that compliance with the rules is hypocrisy, and they’d rather not have any of this. Lauder has a very lax... [Jewish] identity, and a large percentage of the students are not Jewish. These schools also lack a strong commitment to the State of Israel... There is not a single general Jewish educational policy today in Hungary that is unquestionably committed, that can clearly point out its own specific Jewish elements, and those elements that could ensure the survival of the Jewish communities. None of the schools has such a policy.”

This criticism appears to be backed up by former pupils of the school. One interviewee, a graduate of the particular school in question, remarked:

“There is a sense of emptiness despite the fact that Jewish studies is emphasized very strongly in the school’s image. But in reality these are just grand words. Most of the pupils would play with paper aeroplanes during Judaism or Hebrew classes, and very few were interested in extracurricular programmes relating to Judaism. For me the trip discovering the Jewish communities of North-East Hungary was a formative experience; we documented whatever we found, we took photographs and carried out interviews. For me

it was a huge experience, but only five or six kids were up for this from my school. The two teachers whom we were with ran this programme in their spare time. ... I can see a lot more creativity in the informal initiatives... ”

In truth, our interviewees' evaluation of formal Jewish education (i.e. of the Jewish curricula offered by the three large Jewish schools) was extremely varied, which is almost certainly a result of the various differing positions and underlying needs that exist within the Hungarian Jewish community. However, perhaps the essential and unavoidable question is: what kind of Jewish identity-shaping educational strategies can be expected from the Jewish schools, when the majority of Hungarian Jews themselves are unsure about the kind of Jewish identity they want for their children? Many of those who consider the primary role of Jewish schools to be Jewish education have been unhappy with the Jewish curriculum at Wesselényi, criticizing it particularly on the grounds that it is an American import alien to Hungarian Jewish traditions. The Neolog school is criticized for having a purely formal Jewish educational programme, and the secular school receives criticism for its lack of a clear-cut Jewish curriculum at all. In many respects, the uncertainties and weaknesses of the Jewish educational programmes, as criticized by our interviewees, reflect not so much the failure of the schools, but rather the state of the Jewish community.

Further tension is caused by the fact that the Jewish school system mirrors the sociological divisions within the Jewish community: students at the traditional schools come from families with a lower social status living in worse material conditions, whereas students at the secular school tend to come from wealthier families with a higher social status. All of this is reflected in the expectations surrounding general educational standards and the transmission of Jewish traditions: at Lauder, a school with high tuition fees, the former are far stronger than the latter.

In terms of increasing and stabilizing student numbers, interviewees argued that it is important to start with nursery level and build upwards, both because it is relatively easy to attract families with nursery-age children, and in order to allow schools to cultivate their own students over time.

Certainly, this is now the method followed by the Wesselényi, Chabad, and, most successfully, Lauder, where they have recently expanded the nursery by creating a new class in response to high demand. There is, furthermore, demand for a playgroup that stay-at-home parents could attend with their toddlers on an occasional basis, particularly around the time of the Jewish festivals. At the Lauder school, it is also considered important to engage the families of its 500 to 600 students, as the middle generation is particularly hard to reach for purposes of Jewish communal involvement. Beyond families, the Lauder school is also trying to create a loose Jewish network, and attract an audience of outsiders by offering various unique programmes. One such example is the music school within the school:

“Music is an interesting bridge. Every Wednesday our Jewish music school has a club which attracts children from the outside who don't come to Lauder but can be involved through music, as well as Jewish adults. Something really unique is being born here: multi-generational family music sessions, where entire circles of friends come in from the outside. And people also come from the Jewish organizations because there are a few among them who go to Lauder. These are important meeting points.”

During the focus group discussion two key positions emerged concerning formal education. According to the first, the schools in existence today are not capable of producing a new generation of self-conscious Jews ‘*who could guarantee the continued survival of Judaism in Hungary*’. Those who took this stance said that Jewish schools do not provide sufficient Jewish knowledge, and transmit tradition mechanically rather than meaningfully. They maintained that the Jewish knowledge of the young generation, to the extent it exists at all, comes from other sources. They argued that students of the Jewish schools largely disappear from Jewish public life after graduation; one interviewee even went so far as to suggest that these schools ought not to be called Jewish at all.

The other viewpoint saw things in a different light. Whilst accepting the criticism of the Jewish studies curricula, these interviewees stress the importance of the social factor: the very fact that Jewish schools have a higher proportion of

Jewish students than Hungarian schools serves to facilitate connections between Jews, thereby reducing the number of mixed marriages. Furthermore, even though most students of Jewish schools do not become active members of the Jewish community, the majority of young Jews who are active in Jewish communal life are graduates of Jewish schools. Furthermore, it is mainly the students of these schools who appear in the subcultural Jewish networks that exist in Budapest.

Informal Jewish education

Informal Jewish education is multi-faceted and extensive, and constitutes a wide variety of activities including cultural initiatives, youth movements, summer camps, extra-curricula programmes for schools, adult education programmes and walking tours. The organizations and initiatives described below, all of which are based in Budapest as these types of developments are restricted almost exclusively to the city, are the ones most commonly discussed by our respondents.

Bálint Ház, the community centre, provides a home for a variety of Jewish community initiatives, courses, youth and seniors' clubs, events and informal educational projects.

Youth movements active in Hungary include Bnei Akiva, Habonim Dror, Hanoar Hatzioni and Hashomer Hatzair. Mostly Zionist in their outlook, Hungary's Jewish youth movements were all set up in the early 1990s, often under the guidance of Israeli *shlichim* (emissaries). They largely focus on ten to eighteen year-olds, and after an initial period of renaissance in the early years (when they had a collective membership of almost 1,000 people), they have fallen into decline. Today, a few hundred people, at most, are involved. Most of their activists are graduates of the Jewish schools, and their leaders are active in other organizations, most notably the Szarvas camp. Most of the youth organizations are supported by the MAZSIHISZ, but the relationship between them can be quite ambivalent. As a MAZSIHISZ representative reported: *"We do everything we can for the Jewish youth organizations. In return, in a unique act of self-expression, they turn against the community establishment. Our response to this is that there is only one Jewish society and only one Jewish youth,*

so that's the Jewish youth we have to support. And we ought to be glad that we have such clever young people who always say what they want. Otherwise, there is no other way."

Student and young adult organizations include the Kidma Zionist Jewish Student Organization, the Marom Conservative Zionist Student Organization and UJS, the Hungarian Union of Jewish Youth. They are discussed in greater detail in section 4.6.

The *Haver Foundation*, set up in 2002, aims to respond to the growing phenomena of exclusion and intolerance in Hungary by creating and offering extracurricular informal educational programmes on this subject for schools. Interestingly and rather uniquely, the organization is characterized by the range of Jewish perspectives – from observant Orthodox to secular – that exist amongst its board and operative staff. The Foundation has been sufficiently successful to pass on its operational model to the Roma community through its Foundation for Roman Informal Education (Uccu), and to work with Centropa to create a centre for educational methodology.⁸

The *Open University of Jewish Disciplines* is a Chabad adult education initiative. Now in its twelfth year, it offers an introduction to Jewish religion, the Hebrew language and the history of Israel. Through the course, those interested can become more actively involved in community life.

The *Bar Mitzvah Club* is a new Chabad initiative for twelve to thirteen year-old Jewish boys and girls who do not go to Jewish schools. They learn about Judaism, prepare for their *Bar Mitzvah*, and at the end of the year, visit Israel for their *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony at the *Kotel* (Western Wall).

The *Zachor Foundation* runs 'Historic walks in the Jewish district' designed particularly for secondary school pupils, and typically led by trained students. It also does considerable work interviewing Holocaust survivors, archiving and

⁸ Centropa is a Vienna and Budapest-based non-profit NGO that uses advanced technologies to preserve Jewish memory in Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, the Balkans and the Baltics, and then uses those same technologies to disseminate its findings in creative and innovative ways.

documenting Holocaust-related sources, preparing Holocaust educational materials for teachers and students of the subject, and running Holocaust education training.⁹

The Szarvas youth camp accepts Jewish children for two-week stays every summer. This is often a formative experience for young people – both for the participants and the *madrachim* (youth leaders) who run it – and it plays a very important role in the shaping of their Jewish identities.

Szarvas, in particular, was highlighted as a key influential force in Hungarian Jewish life. The summer camp has been run by the JDC, the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation and Bálint Ház for twenty years with the participation of children and teenagers aged from ten to seventeen. It offers a *madrachim* (youth leaders) training course for those coming to the end of their secondary school studies, in which many participate. These young people then keep returning to Szarvas year after year to work as educators. The bulk of young people who are active in Jewish public life today are former Szarvas campers, and for many of them, Szarvas was their first real point of contact with Judaism. As one of the camp organizers said:

“For me it’s a great source of inspiration; I think that today in Central-Eastern Europe, including Hungary, this camp is one of the most progressive things because it projects a positive Jewish identity, with a well-thought-out structure. And it’s not just the campers; those eighteen- or nineteen-year-old ‘madrachim’, the youth leaders, they become real educators without even realizing. They are unaware of the major transformation that they

9 Further vistas were opened up in informal education with the accessibility of interviews recorded with Holocaust survivors by the Los Angeles-based Shoah Institute. All of the 52,000 interviews are available in Budapest at the library of the Central European University. A project has started in which educational material is being created to accompany these interviews: Hungarian educators prepare educational material based on Hungarian-language interviews, adapted to the Hungarian circumstances. Furthermore, in September 2010 the *Holocaust Memorial Centre* launched an international course for Holocaust educators and experts, which will last one year and will take place over three consecutive years. Fifteen participants will receive training each year, and they will then continue to use their newly gained knowledge in their own field.

have undergone. Our methods are unbelievably informal and experiential. It’s a fantastic experience to see a group of twenty-odd-year-olds coming together from all over the region. We hold a seminar in November where we pick the theme for the following year. Young people come to this from Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, etc. After a good half day of brainstorming, we narrow down the possibilities. Therefore, it is genuine pedagogical methodology that trickles down to the campers.”

A former camper, and activist of one of the important Jewish civil initiatives today, similarly said:

“At the Szarvas camp we all had a very important Jewish experience, whether in terms of learning or in terms of community. I do believe that it has a major formative role. Many among the thirty voluntary educators at Haver today, and also several board members, are closely connected to Szarvas. It was mostly at Szarvas, though obviously not exclusively, that 80 per cent of our educators learnt what informal education, Jewish culture and Jewish history meant.”

However, not everyone agrees. A critical voice representing traditional Judaism, noted:

“If the question is whether they have succeeded in imbuing the young participants at Szarvas with the kind of commitment that says ‘Szarvas is ours! It is our task to keep it alive and to maintain it!’ then my answer is no. Have they managed to bring up a generation – even among the ‘madrachim’ – who are committed to learning and Judaism, Jewish tradition, at least familiarity with it? ... My answer is still no. Nevertheless, I think that in terms of making Judaism an essentially positive experience, and shifting the centre of identity from the Holocaust to Israel, to Szarvas, to other Jews and shared experiences, and in terms of developing some strong attachment to the Jewish community in kids – in that sense they have been successful.”

During the focus group discussion, participants pointed out that it was not so much the graduates of Jewish schools who were attracted to these and other informal educational initiatives, but rather young people who had recently developed an interest in Judaism, were in search of their identity and were looking to find a place where they could learn as much as possible about Judaism in an

informal environment. Our respondents argued that the centres of informal education that were able to teach participants ‘to learn Jewishly’ had the best chance of making an impact.

According to participants of the focus group, the greatest obstacle to the growth of informal education was the absence of an effective infrastructure. Other respondents, in addition to some of the representatives of these organizations and initiatives themselves, pointed out to us that most of the grants on which the activities of these organizations were based did not cover infrastructural or material costs. This may not present a problem for the larger organizations, but it greatly hinders the functioning of smaller ones, often forcing them to hide these expenses in their grant applications. The positive side of pure project-financing is that it encourages closer co-operation between organizations; the downside is that creative and innovative small organizations are often at a disadvantage. A further issue highlighted in our data is that it is often difficult to continue successful projects: grantmakers usually show a preference for new projects to the detriment of existing projects.

4.3 Jewish culture

The MAZSIHISZ is engaged in Jewish cultural activity: it organizes and promotes the ‘Jewish summer festival,’¹⁰ its own initiative offering primarily high-quality music events, maintains the Jewish Museum and its temporary exhibits, and supports various initiatives and organizations that apply to the Jewish community for funding for cultural events.¹¹ However, it is mainly organizations which work independently of the MAZSIHISZ that consider the arena of Jewish culture their own.

The largest of these is the Hungarian Jewish Cultural Association (MAZSIKE). Founded in 1988, the MAZSIKE was one of the most important early institutions of the Jewish renaissance. In the early years, it had several

thousand members; today the registered membership is only a fraction of this number. Its website functions as an information base, giving equal space to a variety of Jewish-themed programmes and studies, as well as news relating to everyday Jewish cultural life, current social and communal events and public information. It regularly organizes series of Jewish events in the provincial towns, as well as walks in the Jewish quarter or cemeteries of Budapest. These events try to attract Jews and non-Jews, although in general terms, our respondents suggested that interest in Jewish culture remains largely restricted to Jews alone.

“I can sense a very rigid wall within Hungarian culture surrounding Jewish culture. The mentality that you can see, say, in Western Europe, or even more so in the United States, that Jewish culture is interesting and exciting to others as well, is totally absent in Hungary. Here there are very firm boundaries; you can sense some kind of resentment and a culture of martyrdom: it’s Jews who go to Jewish events. Obviously, Jews go to other events, too, but the average culturally active Hungarian person will not necessarily want to attend a Jewish literary or other similar event.”

One of the most important organs of Jewish culture, *Szombat* – a magazine about Jewish culture and politics whose first issue came out in 1989 – was also created by the MAZSIKE. At present, the magazine is printed ten times a year, and it has a circulation of approximately 1,000 a month. Most costs are met by grants from foreign sources. It also has a website, updated daily with news and press reviews, and twice a week with fresh articles. Recently, the magazine expanded its profile and stopped focusing exclusively on Jewish topics. According to its own data, the printed magazine is read mostly by people with one or more university degrees, an older generation belonging to the middle class or the lower middle class. With the launch of the web version, they have possibly gained more young readers but there are no statistics to confirm this.

Although the magazine has been one of the most important Jewish publications since it was set up, its editors are pessimistic both about recent developments and future prospects.

10 No survey has yet been conducted to find out to what extent the audience of the festival can be considered ‘Jewishly attached,’ but it is likely that it engages much broader circles.

11 The sums that the community contributes to such projects are small, and applicants often criticize the obscurity of the criteria and of the decision-making process.

“There was an upward move from 1989-1990, when Jewish culture was still a curiosity, just like any other initiative that had been taboo during the dictatorship. Back then there was a large audience, and organizers and Jewish cultural workers were very hopeful. Many people came to the events and you could sell a relatively high number of copies or subscriptions compared to today. They also printed more, which brought down the costs. Things were [also] less organized, which meant that voluntary work played a more central role. After a while, however, there had to be some kind of formalization for the magazine to be published regularly and on time... [and this was] achieved by 1993-94. We had a relatively constant salaried staff and authors’ fees that were low but always paid. And then, from the mid-nineties onwards, a decline set in in Jewish cultural life that has lasted to this day. It is caused partly by antisemitism and partly by Jewishness having become politicized: in public life as a whole, Jewishness has become a central political theme, which, I think, has had a highly negative impact on the entire Jewish renaissance. From 1993-94 there was less and less interest, and the problems of everyday survival came more and more to the fore.”

Nevertheless, Szombat is making a very important contribution that goes beyond its magazine and website. Its style is somewhat provocative about Jewish issues; it encourages self-reflection, and is known for going against the mainstream and trying to break certain taboos. It also organizes several events, about four to six per year: discussion forums, literary evenings and conferences. The lectures given at its conferences have been compiled into books and published. Its events focus on certain themes or various art forms: it launched a series on Jewish poets; ran a series of film screenings and a conference entitled *Jewish lives in Hungarian film*; and its series *Jewish lives on the Hungarian stage* provided an overview of Jews in the history of theatre. It was also involved in a conference on fine art which focused on, among other things, Jewish motifs in Hungarian art. Furthermore, Szombat recently started a free literary seminar around the magazine, entitled *Is there a modern Jewish literature?* Based at Bálint Ház and funded by the Pincus Foundation, one respondent described it as follows:

“The audience is very varied: older people with university diplomas, teachers. There are also older people coming from a completely different background; the middle generation has also shown up, and they do not necessarily have a university education. We also have PhD students and some university students.

“This literature course was advertised in Jewish places, with a Jewish theme, and there has been incredible interest in the programme. At one point we had sixty applicants and the whole spectrum of professions was represented, from bus driver to retired psychologist. In a word, people are simply interested in this. There are also some young people, but it’s mainly the elderly who come. And what’s important in all this is that there is a receptive audience who will attend these events if the subject is right.”

In spite of all this activity, perhaps its greatest challenge concerns the general development of a Hungarian Jewish culture:

“There are very few works being written on Jewish themes. We know of very few artists who consciously build on themes from Jewish culture or whose works reflect them. For Jewish culture to become trendier, it ought to become more visible, and for this we need to be able to create projects and bring them to the public. The challenge is the same as fifteen years ago: to create a community out of the Hungarian Jewish audience. This means that they shouldn’t be passive recipients but active and conscious consumers and supporters of culture, which is very atypical here.”

Nevertheless, other efforts are being made to develop Jewish cultural life in Hungary. Various organizations put on cultural events from time to time, in response to the needs of their own members. The Lauder School’s ‘Music Club’ (described above) is one such example, as is the Book Club it runs twice a month. These types of initiatives often work because they happen within an existing organizational infrastructure and can be easily promoted to individuals who are already invested in that. According to our respondents, it is much more difficult to promote Jewish cultural activities without such an infrastructure, as any such attempts involve having to battle against the negative attitudes that people often have towards the idea of joining a Jewish organization:

“There are a lot of people who don’t want to join organizations that have a religious component, but there is no other way really to join them. Since the Jewish community is a community of those belonging to the Jewish faith, you can’t really join these organization on a purely cultural basis. Cultural organizations are also somehow too Jewish, too isolated for these people. But at the same time I can see in my various activities that these people do have some communal and cultural needs after all. When something new appears on the scene, they will perhaps be interested in joining, even if only for a short while... So there is a relatively large group that can still be engaged and that ought to be engaged. I’m not sure I can say exactly how. But I am sure that our traditional institutions cannot really engage them.”

One of the most interesting new cultural developments that does appear to be engaging the younger generation and represents something of a new direction in Jewish cultural life is organized by the Jewish youth movement *Marom*. The Marom Club Society is a non-profit cultural organization that was set up at the initiative of young people. Its objectives include the discovery and reinterpretation of Jewish culture and traditions, and it works to make these relevant to young people in the spirit of tolerance, openness, equality, multiculturalism and the fight against prejudice. It runs *Sirály* (pronounced *shirai*), an important fringe cultural centre in Budapest, and organizes concerts, talks, film screenings, panel discussions and workshops.

One of its most popular events is the Bánki-tó Festival. Taking place over several days on the bank of a small lake sixty kilometres from Budapest, this festival defines itself as a ‘minority’ event rather than a Jewish one, waving the banner of a form of multiculturalism where Judaism is one option among many. Some of our interviewees found such ‘festival Judaism’ completely alien and could not detect any actual Jewish content in it, but it is clear that it engages at least some young Jews and the openness and inclusive attitude of such events can help to build valuable bridges with the host society. It is no coincidence that this type of initiative is launched by the younger generation, whose Jewish identity revolves not so much around the Holocaust, but rather a more positive self-definition based on concepts of multiculturalism.

Limmud, a cultural and educational initiative with its roots in the British Jewish community, has also now reached Hungary, and is important, not least, in that it offers a programme that is actively open to all shades of Judaism. *Limmud* holds one weekend event every year, during which people can learn about a wide range of Jewish topics. It is fully self-sustaining, and in defining itself, it places great emphasis on community building as well as cultural content.

“The secret of the success of Limmud – one of the focus groups participants said – is that it has managed to give people something to make them feel that here whoever is interested in Judaism can do anything connected to it. Because no one is excluded. So Jewish self-realization can take any shape or form... Limmud really is very pluralistic. Anyone can come if they want... Everyone is very tolerant of others, and it all operates in a fairly transparent way.”

In the general discussion that took place about Jewish culture in our focus group, there was a strong sense that Jewish ‘popular’ cultural initiatives were more likely to be successful than ‘high’ cultural activities. Success is further related to the use of spaces and networks that are loosely Jewish rather than part of the formalized communal infrastructure, that allow for spontaneity, and that use new media in creative ways. In stark contrast to some of the comments above, some focus group participants believe that Hungarian society is actually keenly interested in Jewish culture, and that an abundance of non-Jewish financial resources are available for Jewish cultural events. Several people suggested that Budapest should have a major Jewish cultural festival similar to those in Krakow and Prague, and that such a festival could potentially be even more colourful and authentic than these since four to five per cent of the city’s population is Jewish.

4.4 Academic Jewish studies

Although there are several universities in Hungary that teach and research subjects relating to Jewish religion and history, the one place within the Jewish educational framework offering university-level Jewish education is the National Rabbinical Seminary-Jewish University (ORZSE). With its 133-year history and operating under the auspices of the MAZSIHISZ, this institution has 200 to 250

students enrolled in its various departments: rabbinical seminary; training of deputy rabbis, cantors, deputy cantors and social and cultural workers; liturgy and Jewish studies. Since Hungarian universities meet their maintenance costs from state subsidies which depend on student rolls, it is in the interest of institutions to maximize the number of enrolled students, which may, in turn, have an adverse effect on the quality of education. In this sense, ORZSE has faced the same difficulties as most Hungarian universities, with the added challenge that it is mainly chosen by committed Jewish students. It is generally true that most of its students have, in some form or other, been involved in formal Jewish education or Jewish youth movements in the past:

“We can say that the educational and cultural activities of the past twenty years have had some impact, after all. They have aroused some Jewish sensitivity in these people. These students seem to really want to attend a Jewish institution. Beyond getting their degrees, they also have some kind of interest in Judaism.”

However, the standard of education and research at ORZSE was severely criticized by most of our interviewees, including those involved in the university:

“As an institution, it has been trying to maintain at least a fragment of its old standards, but its level of education sank ages ago to that of secondary schools. Despite the fact that they have some professors considered prominent by the public, and who are well-known far beyond Jewish circles..., the fact [is] that the great generation of professors has died out. The circumstances of life in general have changed so much that their academic achievements would be very hard to replicate today. We live in a very different era, in general as well as from a Hungarian Jewish perspective. Our primary task is, essentially, to educate students who will know more than we do. The problem is (and I see this as the Seminary’s greatest problem) that there are insufficient foreign language skills.”

Apparently, it is extremely difficult to recommend up-to-date literature for the students as they can only read English, at best. Thus, whatever is not translated into English or Hungarian cannot be used in the courses.

“Whatever hasn’t been translated into English doesn’t exist. This applies to Hebrew as well... Here we are completely reliant on the fact that out of a hundred students, maybe one or two will speak Hebrew, one or two will really speak two or three languages... But I must say that I have not met a single student who has learnt Hebrew in Hungary, at a Hungarian school, including ORZSE. Before 1945, it was natural that whoever wanted to train as a rabbi spoke a dozen languages: Yiddish, Hebrew, Aramaic, the language of one of the ethnic minorities, Hungarian; they learnt Greek and Latin in the upper forms of the Seminary’s grammar school; lectures were in German, plus they learnt English, French, Italian and Arabic. What we have here is a breach of the traditions. I always say that Hungarian Jews have dumbed down to the level of their environment. They have the same command of languages, the same skills as those in their wider surroundings, and this is not exactly commendable... As long as there is no motivation, no urge to be better than one’s surroundings, to achieve three times as much as anyone else in one’s environment, this will sooner or later become evident both in foreign language skills and in professional skills. In one sense one should give credit to Hungary for this: they have allowed Hungarian Jews to become like the host society, but I’m not convinced that this is a good thing.”

The gaps in language skills could successfully be filled by programmes in which students spend a few months in Israel, not together in groups but on their own, pursuing activities which would help them to acquire a real, practical command of the language.

Those who look at the activities of the Rabbinical Seminary from the outside were even more critical; some went so far as to suggest that it would have been better to have closed the institution down after 1989:

“I don’t think there’s work of any worth going on there. There are instances when one feels genuinely sorry that an institution has not been able to survive as a glorious element of our past. I don’t think we have to preserve every Jewish institution at any cost; there are some that are ready to be closed down. I can’t quite see why it is worthwhile for top academics to be dealing with Jewish studies in Hungary today. I have a rather gloomy

picture of the future of Jewish studies in Hungary. Whoever is interested in this sort of thing will go abroad; there are some excellent courses.”

The same interviewee, who teaches in one of the Jewish studies programmes in the country, expressed serious doubts concerning all similar programmes and proposed a way out of the present situation:

“In Hungary today, I cannot really imagine a scholar of international standing emerging from the programmes here. If someone had \$1m or \$1.5m to spend on something like this, we could pick ten highly talented young people, who have talents in different fields, and even before they set foot in any of the Jewish educational institutions in Hungary, they should be sent away, with very generous scholarships that they could actually live on, to Jewish institutions in Israel, USA, South America or England, to educate them there and then bring them back, secure jobs for them, and then there would be Jewish Studies in Hungary. In the current economic situation, the chances for this are less than zero; therefore, we will probably have to hold on to the rabbinical seminary as it justifies the existence of the MAZSIHISZ. The Hebrew department [at the Eötvös Loránd University – the largest university in the country] is a valid concept; you may or may not like it. But I can’t tell where it is going. Perhaps research in Hungarian Jewish history, or research in Hungarian Jewish literature; fields that are so particular, so marginal on an international scale, may be able to survive here.”

All of the focus group participants agreed that the standard of Jewish higher education at the Rabbinical Seminary and Jewish University was extremely low. At the very least, they felt it important that ORZSE should adopt transparent accreditation requirements. They further expressed considerable concern that the institution has practically no international connections, which is probably because it belongs to the MAZSIHISZ, comes under its direct governance and has no real autonomy.

4.5 Preservation of Jewish heritage

There are a number of Jewish heritage issues in Hungary: the maintenance of Jewish cemeteries throughout the country; the conservation of synagogues and houses of prayer; the safeguarding

of objects and written documents; and the preservation of the Jewish quarter in Budapest. The two largest institutions responsible for this work both function under the auspices of the MAZSIHISZ: the Jewish Museum and the Jewish Archives.

There are between 1,500 and 3,000 Jewish cemeteries in Hungary, mostly located in places where the local Jewish community was annihilated, so the issue of their preservation has become the responsibility of the MAZSIHISZ. The maintenance of these cemeteries (mainly cutting the grass), which is, of course, a Jewish religious obligation, incurs great costs and has little, if any, tangible impact on the life of the Hungarian Jewish community. Many of the descendants of the people buried in these cemeteries live abroad, but the costs are largely incurred by the Hungarian Jewish community; state funding is limited and unlikely to be extended. A community leader made the following comment:

“In the MAZSIHISZ one of the areas that needs the greatest attention is the problem of the abandoned Jewish cemeteries. This is a tremendous burden, too. It costs an incredible amount of money. If you want to talk about what sort of things a fund ought to support, then this is a very good example. Of course I understand that it’s best to invest in the future... but the truth is, no one can ignore the fact that here lie our ancestors – by the way, often of people who now live in London or America. We do what we can, receiving some minimal state funding. Because it’s very hard to explain to people that the cemeteries need to be maintained.”

According to the expert specializing in problems of Jewish heritage, there are other possibilities:

“In my view, part of this is not a financial question but one of organization. To be more precise, it’s a question of who is prepared to take charge. The reason I think this would be a feasible thing is because on my (organized) walks at the cemeteries (we have had these walks for about two years, four or five times a year in every cemetery) there are at least thirty, but more likely fifty or sixty people who are all shocked to see the state of disrepair. They are astonished and they feel personally responsible, non-Jews included, at least those in

Budapest. So there is an interest in this, and people pay attention to this.”

However, there is another opinion among Hungarian Jews, according to which more of the resources should be spent on education, even if it is to the detriment of the cemeteries.

“Participation at the Szarvas camp should be free. The money now spent on renovating cemeteries should be spent on this instead. Not that cemeteries should not be renovated; but the living are more important than the dead. The dead can wait another five years. The living cannot.”

There are initiatives in which a school, civil organization, or even an informal group takes on the task of restoring or tidying up a cemetery, or making an inventory of the tombstones, or documenting the inscriptions. This can be an excellent tool of informal education as it can help shape the identity of young people and schoolchildren.

“It was a symbolic experience for me when a few years ago I saw the Jewish cemetery in Tokaj, by coincidence, when on a canoe trip. It’s on a small island... We paddled across, and I could see young Jewish people camping there and renovating the cemetery on a totally voluntary basis: Jewish youth from Western Europe. Of course, I know that there are also [similar] initiatives in Hungary. But as far as I know, these are also grassroots things, meaning that there is basically no funding; they are organized on a purely voluntary basis, and the MAZSIHISZ gives hardly any money to these projects.”

Many former synagogues and other historic buildings that used to belong to and were used by the Jewish community are no longer in its possession. Differences of opinion exist concerning how today’s community ought to relate to these buildings:

“There are initiatives to save a synagogue here and there. But it’s mostly the cemeteries that are endangered. Because if a synagogue was in a good condition and was preserved and wasn’t later destroyed during the communist dictatorship... wherever this was the case these buildings are looked upon as something valuable. Synagogues are turned into cultural centres, concert

halls or similar. There are several ways to interpret this; you can approve from a cultural point of view. If someone finds the Jewish relevance of a building important, then once the Torah scroll has been removed it’s not a synagogue any more. Let them do what they want with it! But obviously there are buildings in the provinces, objects of aesthetic value, synagogues, tombstones, special tombstones, that indeed should be preserved. Especially the cemeteries, which have a ritual significance, and which have to be preserved until the end of time.”

In terms of the conservation of material objects, there are different considerations at play. In certain instances, there are documents that could be used as evidence in compensation claims. In others, the primary concern is the inherent value of a particular object, especially as some items of Judaica have an increasingly high market value. There is also a more general worldwide interest in archives, and the Jewish Archives in Budapest are no exception.

There have been some major developments at the Archives in recent years, and the chaotic conditions of earlier times have come to an end. In recent years, the Archives have begun to open up to the public; they have created a space for visitors, and experts are now available to assist not only academic researchers but also lay people in finding their way around. The director of the Archives told us:

“I only believe in an archive that is public; in my opinion, whatever other people cannot see, that only I can, does not exist. That’s why we have to get to the point where everything should be completely public and very dynamic. This, by the way, is a new approach in the world of museums and public collections. We have to bring an end to the inaccessibility of the archives. I love to boast about our documents, to show everyone what gems we have, because this is the right thing to do. And this is the reason why we have been digitizing a lot of things and making as much material public as possible, so that this place won’t be hidden any more.”

As part of the above endeavour, the Jewish Archives have been making digitized material accessible under the framework of the Judaica Europeana digitization project co-ordinated by the European Association of Jewish Culture. Part

of the purpose of the project is dissemination, and they have started to develop educational programmes based on the archival material. The Archives have also launched a website called Flódni, presenting every Jewish subject of possible interest: history, culture, the Jews of Budapest, community and the festivals.

“Flódni – everything Jewish. Very complex, and with many layers which, together, make a delicious cake. What we’re trying to show here is that Jews had a major role in making Budapest the city it is today. This, of course, has been erased from our memories, or rather, from the memory of society, since the 1960s. But we mustn’t allow it to be erased so much, even twenty years after the collapse of communism... So in some very subtle way, it ought to be brought back.”

One of the important tasks for the Jewish Archives is to collect the documents of the annihilated communities. Some maintain that the archival heritage of the Jewish communities does not belong to the Jews of Hungary alone but is a shared heritage, but it is not protected in any way by the Hungarian National Office of Cultural Heritage or by the conservation authorities. Indeed, the fate of the material objects and documents is solely dependent on the individual communities that own them. Yet, to date, this initiative has not been organized; there is a lack of experts available, and no funding has been secured for the project. Nevertheless, according to at least one respondent from MAZSIHISZ, considerable progress has been made:

“In the past twenty years we have managed to stop the further deterioration of Jewish material heritage outside Budapest. I think there is one place only, Sátoraljaújhely, where we haven’t really been successful. In all other cases, whatever Jewish monuments there were of any value, we have not allowed these to deteriorate or be destroyed. In Budapest, too, I think we have mostly managed to achieve this objective.”

Nevertheless, the same respondent was far more concerned about the preservation of the old Jewish quarter of Budapest:

“The fate of the Jewish quarter is a completely different story – a story full of failures. Only by 2007–2008 had we come to the point where we

were able to take a determined stand and call a halt to the destruction of the Jewish quarter. Beforehand, the MAZSIHISZ had been indifferent to this matter, to say the least.”

The story of the preservation of the Jewish quarter in Budapest is long and involved, but in essence, this downtown district became a target of property speculations which threatened the destruction of its homogeneous, historic apartment blocks. Many of the buildings in the area are of important architectural value – beautiful art nouveau buildings, for example – but many others, whilst being of little, if any, particular architectural interest, nevertheless form a part of the historic quarter. Considerable effort has been invested in ensuring that the Jewish district is preserved in its entirety as an organically constructed unit, work which, to date, has resulted in making the quarter entirely unique in the whole of Europe.

The mission of protecting the Jewish quarter of Budapest was taken on by a civil initiative called Óvás! Society (the name is a pun on the Hungarian word *óvás*: protection, on the one hand and veto on the other). Working independently of the Jewish institutional framework, the Society was set up in the early 2000s because, by that time, it had become obvious that, for short-term political and economic reasons, the local governments of Budapest and its districts were not going to stop the building complex of the Pest Jewish quarter from falling prey to profitable property development plans. Óvás! has worked consistently to prevent the demolition of the buildings in the district, partly by civil action and partly by applying international pressure. At the same time, it has worked out alternatives for restoration and modernization with the assistance of an impressive group of experts. The organization is run largely by volunteers working on a part-time basis, and it organizes demonstrations to protect individual buildings, and conducts negotiations to try to change legislation and obtain guarantees for the conservation of historic monuments. Despite its very limited resources and the fact that it exists under constant threat of closure, it has, to date, succeeded in securing temporary protection for the entire quarter. Óvás! has, nevertheless, become embroiled in open conflict with the MAZSIHISZ on more than one occasion, when it became clear that statements made by the MAZSIHISZ,

or the actions of its individual officials, were partly responsible for what was happening in the quarter. The Society has also come in for some criticism itself: some maintain that the majority of inhabitants of the so-called Jewish quarter of Pest is not Jewish anymore and has therefore lost its Jewish character anyway, and others claim the approach adopted by Óvás! does not take into account the interests of the residents.

Fundamentally, as was discussed at some length in the focus group, one of the primary issues surrounding Jewish heritage work is the extent to which conservation of the past should be prioritized, as opposed to investment in the present and future. Many argued that this is not a zero sum game – as was mentioned above in connection to cemetery preservation, heritage work could be used to a much greater extent in contemporary community-building and identity-shaping. Indeed, thinking in this way may help to draw in support from Jews living outside of Hungary too. There was also strong recognition of the fact that there was a need to be consciously selective in activities of heritage conservation, and that the areas that lend themselves most closely to community building activity ought to be given preference. This may, of course, come at a price, and particular parts of Hungarian Jewish heritage may need to be sacrificed in the interest of saving others. In essence, as one respondent argued:

“Our material heritage is crucial – our synagogues, etc. However..., all this is important only if it can serve Jewish life, and not at any cost. This irrational clinging to how “it was for our ancestors, our fathers and grandfathers who built it etc, etc...”, is not good. If a situation arises where [a building] has to be demolished, it doesn’t have to break our hearts. We should be focusing on those buildings that serve the present and the future.”

4.6 Young adult (eighteen to thirty year-olds) engagement

The most well-known organizations focusing on young people over the age of eighteen are UJS, the Hungarian Union of Jewish Youth; Kidma, a Zionist Jewish Student Organization; and Marom, the Conservative Zionist Student Organization.

UJS originally evolved spontaneously, and is the Hungarian member of the World Union of Jewish Students (WUJS). It reaches out to university

students up to the age of thirty, and tries to reach people with Jewish roots mainly in informal ways and through personal social networks. It does not think in terms of conventional membership, but rather simply organizes events open to both Jews and non-Jews. The organization mostly exists in isolation from the Jewish youth movements, and recently its activity has declined significantly.

Kidma is an organization for university students and graduates in their twenties, whose members are probably mostly Jewish, although they do not ask questions of those who wish to join. The roots of the organization go back to Hashomer Hatzair: its core members are former Hashomer Hatzair youth leaders and their circle of friends. Their events used to be frequented not only by young people aged twenty-five to thirty but also others, for example, their parents’ generation. In recent years they too have lost some of their prominence: part of the problem may be that most of the members are in the process of building their careers and settling down.

The story of both UJS and Kidma parallels the story of Hungarian Jewish life more generally: after enjoying an initial renaissance in the early 1990s, they have rather gone into decline in more recent years. Generally speaking, it seems that the declining influence of these organizations has been closely related to the transformation of young Jewish society. Whereas in the early 1990s it was essentially through these organizations that young Jews could make a formal connection to Jewish life, in the following decade this role was taken over by Jewish schools and programmes offered by the Sochnut, such as Taglit and MASA.

As a result, some are very pessimistic about the future. One of our interviewees, a rabbi, said the following:

“A few years ago we decided to do a survey among graduates of the three Jewish schools. We sent out a questionnaire asking them how they were, what they were up to, what ties they had to the Jewish community, since they had already been involved in the past. They didn’t reply – which shows that we have pretty much lost these people.”

However, a fairly broad and loosely-connected young Jewish crowd has emerged, which frequents the downtown ‘ruin pubs’ and other

places of fringe entertainment. This network of a few thousand people has arisen completely spontaneously and independently from the organized Jewish community, although it will, from time to time, attend certain Jewish cultural events and appear at street festivals even though it does not join in the activities of Jewish organizations in any systematic fashion. Marom, an organization which specifically aims to engage this crowd by offering a great variety of events that do not necessarily focus on Jewish themes, is doing some interesting work in this regard. Marom grew out of regular student meetings, and became a conventional Jewish student organization with a camp and one or two large parties every year. It mainly targets the generation of university students, but its circle of supporters has been expanding and now includes people aged eighteen to thirty-eight. It is an open organization in every sense of the word. Looking to increase the circle of those involved in Jewish culture, it created *Sirály*, a coffee shop and an alternative cultural centre in the heart of Budapest with a broad selection of programmes that changes continuously to accommodate changing demands. In its listings a great deal of space is given to events that respond specifically to the needs of this youth subculture.

Whilst some regard this work as innovative, cutting edge and more than noteworthy, it is not without its critics. In particular, some of our respondents maintained that the Jewish content of Marom is completely peripheral in its most popular events and activities, and the Jewishness of the organization (and other similar initiatives) is of importance only to a small number of core activists, and tends to be highlighted mostly for external funders. One of our interviewees, who is highly committed to Jewish tradition, made the following comment:

“The past five years have seen the emergence of another very interesting trend: that of the totally uncommitted festival Jews. It’s a bit like the Jewish festival of Krakow, which lacks only one thing: Jews. The pub-renaissance taking place in the Jewish quarter in the sixth and seventh districts is something similar. It creates a totally individualized Jewish community and does not nurture any Jewish communal sensibilities in the classical sense. On the contrary: it rejects such sensibilities; a postmodern, strangely multicultural

and strangely uncommitted community has been emerging that may be familiar with the basics of Jewish traditions, but rejects them. For example, there emerges a very strange postmodern identity that essentially supports intermarriage, and whose key vocabulary includes words such as cool, trendy and progressive. Certainly not knowledge, depth or commitment; rather, these words are seen as negative and off-putting. I find this phenomenon seriously detrimental.... I’m not saying that it’s not good to have such places, but I certainly wouldn’t want every Jew to become like that. There seems to be a massive base and demand for this; I don’t happen to be one of those who need it. Although I do participate in the festival at Bánk, and would like to see the Israeli Cultural Institute co-operating with these organizations. It’s just that my ideas of identity, my visions of Jewishness are very different from theirs... Of course it’s a good thing that they are able to engage people who need to be engaged. I agree that it is totally legitimate; just because I don’t like it doesn’t mean it’s not needed.”

The most recent arrival on the young adult scene is Moishe House Budapest (discussed above in section 4.1), which has generated a considerable amount of activity, but is too recent a development to be able to assess here. Beyond this initiative and the work of the aforementioned organizations, a number of young adults also elect to volunteer for certain Jewish charities and foundations. Indeed, several of the organizations we spoke to in the course of this research rely heavily on the contribution of such volunteers, including the *Haver Foundation*, the *Zachor Foundation*, the *Jewish Archives*, the *Holocaust Memorial Centre* and *Bálint Ház*. The volunteers involved in these also include students in the Jewish day schools. An employee of the Haver Foundation told us:

“At Haver we work together as partners. I learn from them just as they may learn from me. The question is, what can we do together to solve a problem or a critical situation? This egalitarian approach is really important; it means that even though we may have different responsibilities or roles, we are equally significant from the point of view of the organization. Volunteers get the experience of having contributed to something; they themselves have been able to give something. They act not according to expectations or within strict boundaries, and thus what they stand for will

also become attractive to others. We think together about what challenges we face and what responses we want to give. It is partly about finding a way and finding an identity; here they get a chance to talk to their peers about these things. Something else that's important is belonging to a group, a sense of community."

Young volunteers (particularly former participants in Birthright) are also involved in the joint Sochnut/JDC initiative, *Meeting of Generations*, in which they work with elderly Holocaust survivors, over the course of a year, to prepare for a joint trip to Israel.

"The young people who get involved are on an intense search for identity, but can't seem to find this path within any of the conventional organizations. So they try here and there. And they seem to find their community right here in this programme, right now. I think it is a positive development when we launch a programme with twenty young people and then they start to build connections on their own, organize events, bring the community together or start to learn Hebrew. They do it all by themselves, no one is putting any pressure on them. I am aware that this is just a tiny micro-initiative, but still, it means that people who are of a similar age but have very different interests can co-operate in certain things... These young people meet the older participants once a month, and the older people tell them about their experiences during the Holocaust, or before the Holocaust, and under communism..."

"And the young people tell the older ones about Israel and about the way young Jews today relate to Judaism. So a dialogue begins between the generations. Then, at the end of the programme, the two groups go to Israel together, and it's basically the young people showing Israel to the old ones. It's a very complex programme with a number of educational implications; it's a very powerful experience and a powerful therapy for both the young and the old participants. For the young in the sense that almost all of them came to this group having found out that they were Jewish in a very traumatic experience. They are the third generation, searching for their identity. At the same time, it's also therapeutic for the older participants as it gradually becomes clear, in the course of the programme, that they can't

really deal with their identity, either. And then how they pass this on to their children is yet another problem. The middle generation is left out of all this, not coincidentally; and the fact that the older generation has a problem relating to their own children when it comes to questions of identity, and vice versa, is not a coincidence, either. The second generation is a hugely problematic generation."

Our interviewees unanimously agreed that there are also a number of small initiatives in this field that do excellent work. In all cases, great emphasis is placed on personal connections, loose organizational structures, freedom for individual initiative and creative methodologies. However, it has proved difficult to expand these initiatives precisely because of their network-like organizational structures and the central role of interpersonal connections. The big question for the future is to what extent such initiatives can multiply, how they will be able to sustain themselves outside the official Jewish institutional framework and whether they will be capable of working together to maximize their overall impact.

During the focus group discussion, we raised the question of why the mobilization of the young generation was not more successful. Some members of the group pointed to the political changes since 1989. They argued that young people who had been socialized in the new system were, they believed, a lot more individualistic and less open to communal commitments than those who had first become involved in Jewish public life right after 1990. Others saw things differently, and pointed the finger of blame at Jewish organizations that have been unable to offer a communal experience that appeals to young people:

"If [an organization] is unable to offer a community experience, no matter how meaningful its events are... no one will go there."

Szarvas again came up as an important counterexample, but even in this instance, others maintained that its success was relative:

"This success, what exactly does it mean? As soon as the camp tries to educate people about Judaism in a more structured way, it always fails. So in my view this is also just party-Judaism."

4.7 Leadership development

The training of future Jewish leaders is carried out in a variety of ways. The rabbis working in the Jewish community are largely graduates of the Rabbinical Seminary. The young generation of Jewish leaders, especially those active in organizations outside the community framework, have often received their training from some of the newer and more creative organizations. The best organized and most comprehensive form of informal leadership training is the *madrichim* training programme at Szarvas.

“Szarvas is the only one that I can think of where there has been some continuity. Today the camp is led by a 28-year-old guy, the programme director is the same age as him, the whole team is young, and they are constantly changing. Some stay, some are replaced.”

However, one of the problems facing Szarvas, is that the camp is unable to accommodate everyone who is eager to become a *madrich* or *madricha* there:

“Although many of them are motivated, there are just not enough opportunities. They can try and go to another organization but that will also be hard. Perhaps Limmud can provide a similar experience.”

Bálint Ház also runs two-year leadership training courses, mostly attended by its own volunteers. It is a general Jewish community youth leadership programme; nevertheless, the vast majority of young people apply because they want to become *madrichim* at Szarvas. There are other, small organizations, such as Hashomer or Habonim, who run their own training schemes for future-generation leaders.

In truth, leadership training has been one of the most problematic areas of Hungarian Jewish community life. Very few people participate in the above-mentioned organizations, and even those who do tend to disappear later from Jewish public life. When young people grow out of the youth movements, there seem to be no natural paths of continued involvement in the Jewish community, except for those who participate in religious life. Hence, in the youth movements, there is a continual danger of the entire organization collapsing when a generation

becomes too old and leaves. The next generation has to build up everything from scratch again, and the new leaders, whilst often enthusiastic, lack skills and experience.

“Often there is a lot of enthusiasm, and then all of a sudden they stop and that’s it. These people take out for themselves, rightly, I think, whatever they need for their own identity-building, and then most of them move on to a career as lay professionals. What’s happening is understandable in the sense that this is not about them having received something and then passing it on. Rather, there is no continuity, so the entire story, including these past twenty years, has been about the forty and sixty years that came before, because the continuity has broken. Whoever wants to do something about their Jewishness, first they build it up for themselves and then there’s a good chance that they will be able to pass it on to their children. So, the goal is not for one to be building this up in oneself, receiving something from the outside, and then giving it all back to the community. Rather, a person receives something from which they can build themselves up. And they can then pass it on to their children, who will perhaps be able to make something of this continuity, or not.”

In principle, future Jewish leaders could be selected from among the students of Jewish schools, but in reality this is seldom the case. The reason for this is, partly, that the schools pay no attention whatsoever to the problem; indeed, they rarely even acknowledge it:

“Young people show absolutely no interest in the future of the Jewish community. They do not want to take on political roles in the public sphere, or to think about where we are going, what our task is, what the responsibility of the Jewish community is on a societal or communal level. For example, the question of what could be done in the next five years to make ourselves a lot more self-sustaining than we are now. It’s obviously much harder now, in an existing structure, than it was for us twenty years ago, when there was no structure. The other day I was looking for photos from the early nineties, and I kept seeing the same people, including myself, in all the pictures, even though eighteen years have passed, but it’s as if we had been swallowed by this time warp. It’s astonishing.”

The community management is of the opinion that the selection of leaders ought to take place within the framework of the Jewish community:

“I think that sooner or later there will be some young people who won’t believe in fighting any more but in co-operation, and will be able to achieve their goals while remaining a part of the Jewish community and trying to make a career within the system so that later they can become leaders. This would be the normal course of things. In my view, if the current structure were destroyed, the result would be not the emergence of a new and better structure but the complete abolition of the institutional framework of Hungarian Jewry; and they wouldn’t be able to build that up again.”

In contrast, one of the leaders active in the civil movements says that under the present circumstances, the selection and training of leaders can only be effective if it takes place outside the institutional framework and the formal organizations:

“There is a unique post-communist reflex in Hungary, some kind of corner-cutting, ‘let’s talk about it’-type attitude, in which acknowledgment is not based on the quality of the work one does. Thanks to this, leadership training has practically been aborted. Currently there are three paths: one is to become a leader within the MAZSIHISZ, which is basically realized through the synagogue, and is an appointment for life. Such a person could, in principle, be the right choice, but all in all, they will probably not be the right person. Another path is the leadership training of the missionary organizations; this means their own globalized franchise of leadership training, based on a foreign model, with guaranteed promotion. Or that of the youth movements, where they train people to ensure the continuity of existing activities. The third is the autodidactic path – and this is where I would place myself – the path of people who have their own ideas of how a community should be run. I can see this in Marom, and to some extent in Haver. There are few organizations today in Hungary that are strong enough to do this. Perhaps Szarvas, something may be happening there; after all, they have a lot of young people making waves there.”

Members of the focus group agreed that the pool from which future Jewish leaders can be selected is very small. Many people who would otherwise be suitable for community leadership roles distance themselves from the Jewish organizations, and thus never come into a position where they could become leaders. The emergence of suitable leaders is often hindered by the autocratic selection system of the organizations. One of the important tasks for the future may be for Jewish schools to take on a more central role in the education of Jewish leaders and in the development of leadership skills. A criterion for this is the creation and introduction of carefully planned Jewish educational programmes appropriate for the schools’ profiles and constituency.

4.8 Innovation and social entrepreneurship

The entire concept of innovation and social entrepreneurship in the Hungarian Jewish community is rather different from the phenomenon in American Jewish life, because, whilst a Jewish communal infrastructure has been present in the country for more than 150 years, the entire community had cause to rethink itself in the aftermath of the collapse of communism. Nevertheless, there is something of a creative spirit amongst young Hungarian Jews that mirrors innovative developments in other parts of the Jewish world, that can be seen in the emergence of Marom, Moishe House Budapest and Limmud. It is within these subcultural initiatives, that our interviewees saw evidence of genuine innovation:

“As for the last ten years of Jewish life, I think it has been at a low ebb and has come to a halt. All of that rich civil sphere that appeared after 1990: societies, clubs, federations, they have all lost their dynamism, and they are at a low ebb. They organize events, camps and clubs. But that sense of mission has essentially been lost. Some new and interesting initiatives have emerged, for example, Marom, or the Sirály centre and their events, which are exciting, contemporary, have a constant online presence and organize festivals. This is exactly the kind of programming that fits well into today’s mainstream and is in fashion today: it fits into this western mainstream of human rights, minority-protecting, ‘black is beautiful’, ‘small is beautiful’, everything that’s small and oppressed is beautiful. All this is interesting and very modern, but quite apolitical. Or rather, it is politicized in

that trendy sense as expected by the mainstream left in the west today. It means movements advocating pro-minority, anti-racist and anti-exclusionist ideologies – and this is where I can see a renewal.”

Several respondents mentioned the internet as the scene of innovative activities, especially Judapest, a blog that ran for a few years but is now defunct, yet aroused interest in both Jewish and non-Jewish circles.

“There was a blog called Judapest which ran for a few years. Actions were less prominent there but it gave space to opinions, approaches and ideas that had not been given any publicity before. They may have appeared in close circles or small communities, or within very narrow confines. But what it really did was to open up publicity on a societal level. There were a lot of ideas, approaches, criticism, and so on, there was a debate, which had not been typical before. And in this sense this was a change.”

In addition, the organization of the Hungarian Limmud conference was also noted in this regard:

“Limmud has been running for a few years now. It basically started as a project of the JDC... It’s one of the few instances where community-building has actually been successful. Within three or four years, a circle of leaders has emerged who said, fine, we don’t want a partner organization, but you can support us if you like what we do. But if you don’t like what we do, we will still carry on doing it! And if the first conference only brings in fifteen people instead of 350, then it will be fifteen people only. But those fifteen people will want to do what Limmud is really all about. [Limmud is] genuinely based on a complete pluralism of values, really, whatever qualifies as Jewish is welcome to come. It’s a very exciting question whether it will still exist in two years’ time, when the current board members have used up all their energies and have resigned. The principles of Limmud are strict principles that were developed over thirty years, with hard work, around the world. So, it is clearly set out what participants and organizers have to keep in mind. It’s very exciting. If it manages to strike roots, that will be a revolutionary achievement in Hungary. The idea that I’m a participant who gives a talk, but at the same time I’m paying to be there, because I’ve gathered the community together and I want to hear what the other person has to say; this, in itself, is completely

unknown on the level of contemporary Hungarian society. It would be great if younger people also got involved in organizing the event, those between twenty-five and thirty-five, but this generation is very hard to engage. The present board members are actively seeking their successors. To be a Limmud board member costs one a lot of money, and the only thing one gets in return is the success of the organization, and it takes up a lot of work and a lot of time. It’s community work in the real sense, and of course it’s hard, since it takes away time from one’s family, children, friends, work, parents and relationship, so it’s a serious burden on one’s shoulders, and on an annual level there’s very little positive feedback. However, each and every Limmud conference so far has been able to strengthen the commitment of the board members; it gives them a boost that will help them get through the year ahead.”

However, perhaps because much of the community’s infrastructure is itself so new, there is a considerable amount of creativity going on within more mainstream environments. Bálint Ház is a good example:

“Our main task is to provide a meeting point for all kinds of Jewish individuals, organizations and groups to connect. This means that we want Bálint Ház to be an incubator... To give space to various initiatives, and we will help them and offer them a partnership on every level. Partly by saying feel free to use our rooms, and partly by coming up with ideas together... Our other task... if we really want to reach out to Jews who haven’t come to the community yet, is to offer lots of different opportunities and to open many different doors... So, if someone comes here for the first time because they want to use the playroom, that’s great. If they come because they want to work out in our fitness facilities, that’s also great. The main thing is that they come, because once they’re here we do believe that we can keep them here. The hardest part is bringing people in. The third thing is our multi-generationality, meaning that we are a community centre. It’s not a youth centre, and not a club for the elderly, but a community centre, and communities are made up of different generations; and we try, as much as possible, to make the generations meet. It’s not an easy task. From what I can see, they don’t really meet, and in general, the different generations seem to meet less and less. And finally, our fourth aim is to be a shop window;

this means that we are a Jewish community centre, certainly for the Jewish community, but not only. We want anyone to be able to come. Obviously, it's more difficult to walk into a synagogue than to walk into a community centre. Let all of the non-Jews come in and let them see what it means to be Jewish, let them experience it, live it, learn about it. Let them come to Ringató (a mothers-and-toddlers event), let them meet Jewish mothers, so that all this becomes normal to them. These are the essentials. On top of all this, we try to organize events, especially for adults, targeting the age group which is the hardest to engage: those between twenty-five and fifty-five, twenty-five and sixty. We have developed various innovative programmes that will perhaps help us get through to those who are otherwise so hard to reach."

Chabad too, is breaking new ground. Its Chanukah candle-lighting in Nyugati Square in central Budapest, or its Chabad tent at the big rock festival which takes place every summer in the city, both make an important contribution to the raising of awareness about Jewish life and presence within Hungarian society.

"When we first did the Chanukah candle-lighting in 1998 in Nyugati Square, there was a lot of concern and criticism. Similarly, when we first set up our tent at the Diáksziget festival. Today it's become natural. Other Jewish street events have also appeared, and there's this Judafest, which is not a religious Jewish event but it's still a Jewish event. Then there's the Jewish Summer Festival. The word 'Jewish' can be seen on giant posters in the streets. It is a central, and conscious, element of our strategy to bring this Jewish identity into the public awareness. It's important both from the point of view of the Jewish community and from the perspective of public awareness within Hungarian society."

Another interesting area of innovation has focused on Jewish-themed events in provincial towns. These are particularly significant because so much of the Jewish community and Jewish activity is based in Budapest, but in recent years, literary events, roundtable discussions, exhibitions and concerts have become more common in the provinces. By participating in these events, the audience, some of whom inevitably come from Budapest, help to contribute to the strengthening or even survival of the local Jewish community.

"These events greatly help the formation of the identity of the local community. Tokaj is an excellent example: it started with [a group from Budapest] going there for weekends, years ago, and they kept going until fifteen people announced that they were going to establish the Jewish community of Tokaj. It was set up, it is now a member of the MAZSIHISZ, and everyone knows that this is a Jewish community whose members mostly live in Budapest but now they don't just go once a year but at least once a month. And they have a 'minyán' [prayer group] there, they pray, and all this, of course, moves things forward."

In general, as members of the focus group argued, innovation is largely the result of individuals choosing to invest their energies in personal projects within the Jewish community. If a determined person has clear objectives, and is ready to make sacrifices and put a lot of work into a project, as in the case of the highly successful Judapest blog, they may be able to turn it into an institution and acquire some funding, as was also the case with the Haver Foundation. However, most innovative projects do not reach a point where they can start to function as an independent institution, as the initiators often run out of energy before this point. Generally speaking, personal commitment, clear objectives, spontaneity and, where possible, the use of new media all help to make innovative initiatives succeed.

4.9 Funding and philanthropy

A survey conducted in 2004 showed that within the income structure of Hungarian Jewish voluntary organizations as a whole, 42% of the total income comes from donations, and 19% from domestic resources. This is more or less in line with the income streams of both Hungarian non-Jewish voluntary organizations and Jewish voluntary organizations in other western countries.¹² In the synagogues, for example, many people do donate money, and during the High Holy Days, the larger charities make appeals. Whilst experience has shown that many dislike contributing to large charitable funds, campaigns of this sort can be successful if people are given

¹² It is important to note, however, that these figures are not typical of the Jewish communal institutions of the MAZSIHISZ, or of those organizations within the part of the Jewish community that has close ties to the government or the official communal structure.

precise information about where their money is going and what it will be used for. Having recognized this, synagogues have established separate foundations where the district office is accountable for the donations coming into the fund. These sums can be clearly separated from funding coming from central, government resources. In the following case, the rabbi of a Budapest synagogue guarantees that donations will be used for appropriate, concrete, clearly-defined and traceable causes, and the result is that more people are willing to donate. He told us:

“The Synagogue Foundation has close to 100 people paying in donations each month. The amounts vary from 500 to 1,000 forints (approximately €1.85 to €3.70). Hungarian Jews are not particularly charitable, but we have noticed that sending a thank you letter to donors makes a big difference, and so do transparency and feedback. If someone comes in here, they can see that the walls are freshly painted, the interior is well lit, and they will notice that the prayer books have been newly bound.”

However, beyond this type of activity, there are not many who give donations. Indeed, in general, our respondents detected a weak culture of charitable giving in Hungary. They argued that, in many respects, the development of such a culture has been hindered by existing structures: government funding goes directly to the MAZSIHISZ, and the annuities received in compensation for the looted possessions of the previous generation are also handled by the MAZSIHISZ. As a result, any funds or support received from the MAZSIHISZ tend to be regarded as entitlements. Furthermore, there appears to be quite a widespread lack of trust in Jewish institutions, and in the MAZSIHISZ in particular, which, in turn, is projected onto other Jewish organizations, and disincentivizes giving. External incentives are hard to come by too: Hungarian tax laws do not benefit donors to the same extent that western tax systems do.

Nevertheless, our respondents felt that potential donors could be mobilized, albeit with the same provisos one would make in any other context: project objectives need to be clear and well-defined, and donors need to have sufficient confidence in the project organisers to make an investment. Interestingly, some of the smaller, more flexible organizations appear to have had

greater success in this regard; the leader of a small and relatively successful Jewish voluntary organization described the situation in the following words:

“A lot of people say that there is no culture of giving in Hungary. But my view is that there is no culture of asking. Again, we’re talking about a relationship, or rather, how this relationship can be maintained. It has certain preconditions: reliability, transparency, integrity. Also, it depends on how transparent the organizational structure, leadership and control are. Whether the decision-making processes, budgets and priorities are made public. These basic fundamentals are missing. So I think it is in this direction that steps ought to be taken. There are some very positive initiatives, for example the Hungarian Mitzvah initiative, which is a donation portal set up by a group of private people. We badly need examples. If one model appears, perhaps it will also inspire others.”

This may be beginning to happen. The evidence indicates that the organizations that are successful in fundraising from private donors have increased their income from these sources in recent years. Nevertheless, even these organizations have probably not made the most of the available opportunities, probably as a result of their own lack of funds and/or professional fundraisers. Although large sums have been donated by businessmen for the establishment of both the Israeli Cultural Institute and Chabad’s new, great synagogue, respondents argued that entrepreneurial circles, and in particular those with a non-Jewish background, are generally difficult to approach.

“There must be one or two larger companies who support certain causes, although obviously these need to be spectacular causes. And this Jewish thing, it’s not so trendy right now. The other day I asked a PR expert friend of mine what he thought about this, since it is what he does. He said a non-Jewish organization will not... well... take on a Jewish project. And the strange fact is that unfortunately Jewish sponsors are even less likely to support Jewish causes in Hungary. If they do donate, they’d rather donate to anything but Jewish causes, as that would be so embarrassing.”

The Jewish schools have launched some initiatives to try to change this culture. Every year at

Chanukah, students of Jewish schools visit elderly people and the Jewish hospice in the framework of the 'Hanukaritas' programme. At the Lauder School, a *mitzvah* programme is currently under development.

"At our school the 'mitzvah' programme has been a part of the lifestyle curriculum. We came up with ideas as to what we could do, from nursery to graduation, to teach students to donate money or do charitable work. We could make more progress if we were able to free up some of the work hours of our colleagues to run this project. Or if there was a grant. Children go out to visit the elderly, they collect stuff to donate and they go to cemetery restoration camps."

Since all of our focus group participants had extensive experience of the workings of foreign charities and foundations in Hungary, the topic of charitable giving generated quite heated debate. A minority felt that foreign donors ought only to support individual, fully transparent and accountable projects. However, the majority had serious misgivings about this. Several respondents argued that every project incurs certain infrastructural costs for which it is often difficult to set money aside from funds that serve solely to finance a specific activity. As a result, grant applicants feel compelled to be slightly dishonest; they need infrastructural support, but often hide these core costs in their applications, which, in turn, results in the projects submitting unclear final accounts. Not dissimilarly, applicants sometimes present existing projects as new ones after the first phase of funding comes to an end, simply in order to maintain the work they are doing. This can serve to diminish donors' trust in organizations that otherwise pursue goals considered worth supporting. Our respondents argued that these problems could be solved if project funding included at least partial infrastructural support for the organizations, or donating bodies were willing to make general contributions to organizations they support, on the understanding that their operations were fully transparent. Indeed, one respondent argued that organizations that do not fulfil the objectives for which they receive funding, or are not able to account for the funds in a transparent manner, should be put on a blacklist accessible to potential donors; i.e. incorrect behaviour should have negative repercussions.

In conclusion, even though the position surrounding charitable giving seems to be better than its public image would suggest, and although there seem to be more people donating more to Jewish causes than is generally believed, the socio-economic status of Hungarian Jews indicates that they are able to support Jewish institutions and initiatives to a greater extent than they do at present. However, a cultural change is required in order to achieve this, and this would probably require a degree of infrastructural investment. From the perspective of Jewish organizations, it is clear that they need to explain clearly to potential donors how their funds will be invested, provide transparent accounts to allow donors to assess how their funds are being used, and maintain regular contact with donors to ensure that their personal expectations are continually being borne in mind. From the perspective of the community as whole, one of the surprising findings in our earlier surveys was that the majority of Jewish organizations in Hungary are unknown even to most of those who are otherwise open to charitable giving. There is an absence of public communication within the Jewish community about Jewish organizations and the work they do, and about possible directions and ways of Jewish charitable giving. In essence, community organizations – particularly the most effective, small grassroots ones – need help building a professional fundraising infrastructure; new or existing tools for effective communication with community members need to be supported; and educational and cultural efforts designed to build a culture of giving need to be backed. The creation of a culture of giving could be an important step in the process of eliminating dependence on a single central source of distribution, and this, together with a gradual change in mentality, may lead to structural change.

4.10 Welfare: children and the elderly

The network of social care services is possibly the most developed and best-functioning part of the institutional framework belonging to the MAZSIHISZ. Care of the elderly is particularly well organized, which is partly explained by the fact that the older generations have the strongest links with the MAZSIHISZ. The MAZSIHISZ operates its own welfare institutions and services, and runs such activities jointly with the JDC:

“It is of major importance that, with the intensification of funding from both domestic and foreign resources, Holocaust survivors receive excellent care. Their numbers have dropped from 25-30,000 twenty years ago to 8-11,000 today. But we have managed to create a system that provides them with truly solid material security.”

Elderly people are also looked after in the religious framework, at synagogue level. Most synagogues support the participation of the elderly in Jewish festivals (e.g. *seder* night dinner) with the help of the MAZSIHISZ. As the interviews revealed, it is generally easier to receive funding for care of the elderly than for other purposes. One of the rabbis we interviewed spoke about the dilemmas surrounding this field of activity:

“I think we take too much advantage of our elderly for purposes of receiving funding. It always works when we ask for funding if we add that we have a huge number of Holocaust survivors, but I’m not convinced whether we really help them... There used to be five or six clubs for the elderly in Hungarian synagogues that worked and that were good. Today there is one or perhaps two. So, religious Jewish communities have given up this work. Bálint Ház is perhaps the only one that actually looks after them. I mean their Shalom Club is really good and looks after twenty, thirty or perhaps fifty old people. We have already lost a lot of our elderly members. But there are some old men who participate actively in the religious side of things and they could serve as a bridge to Judaism. We have a lot of young people who are moved by the elderly. Many old people come during the festivals, but it’s hard to reach out to them.”

In the areas of child welfare and geriatric care, the primary player in Hungary is the Hungarian Jewish Social Aid Foundation (MAZS), established in 1991 by the Hungarian office of the JDC. The Foundation co-operates with the MAZSIHISZ in a number of areas, but is independent from it. Initially, it focused mainly on supporting Holocaust survivors, providing a variety of social services from the compensation funds it receives from the Claims Conference: cleaning, daily care and assistance (by social workers and volunteers), delivery of cooked kosher food, public transport and medication subsidies. Many have also benefited from the glasses replacement programme and talking

books for those with impaired sight. The support provided by MAZS is available only to those in need; their assessment is based on a number of strict criteria including social circumstances, income, state of health and expenses. Although most survivors live in Budapest, the home care programme of MAZS is also run in the provincial towns. With the termination of funding from the Claims Conference, they now need to find new resources to continue their activities.

The activities of MAZS also include child welfare services. One particular area of child welfare concerns granting access to Jewish education; this mainly concerns the Lauder School where families pay high tuition fees, which presents many of them with a serious financial challenge:

“Never before have we had so many people leaving for financial reasons. This was what inspired us to completely transform our scholarship scheme, starting from September 2010. It is now based on social criteria but personal achievements are also taken into account. Nobody will receive financial support just because they’re in need; we only want to subsidize children who have a reason to want to come here, who can offer something to the school with their diligence, their values, their family’s values or their achievements. And we want to subsidize such children a lot more, and with greater sums. It can be any achievement, not necessarily in a particular subject. We hope that with the help of our scholarships, intellectual Jewish families who could otherwise not afford to keep their children here will be able to do so. There are roughly thirty families who have more than one child that they can’t pay for; the decision always has to be made which child is staying and which is leaving. So for the first time this year we have offered several such families a long-term tuition waiver, provided that their children keep up the good work... And we hope that this will be a motivating factor for those who otherwise would not consider coming to the Lauder School.”

Previous research has shown that, whereas there are families with children within the Jewish community who are facing severe financial difficulties, there is a lot more demand for special, non-financial aid programmes than for financial support. While counselling, crisis intervention and mentoring programmes are provided by the Jaffe Jewish Family Support

Service, these are accessible to a very narrow circle only. Generally, child welfare does not include services that are provided by the local social service networks to their eligible residents. These, however, are typically difficult to access due to the heavy overdemand on the national service network. It is, therefore, important for the Jewish community to provide assistance to its members in these areas (including educational and career counselling, learning difficulties and special needs, therapy or counselling for children with behaviour problems), or at least to provide families with information as to where they can seek professional help.

4.11 Combating antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment

According to both Jewish and non-Jewish public opinion, antisemitism in Hungary has gained strength in recent years, or, at the very least, has become more pronounced. It manifests itself mainly in the media and in the street, and antisemitic voices increase in volume during election campaigns in particular. According to a leader of the Jewish community:

“I wouldn’t go so far as to say that they are already preparing the cattle cars for us... I mean, I don’t think that Hungary has become an antisemitic country. I don’t think Jews here are in too much danger. However, there is no doubt that from the point of view of general atmosphere and everyday antisemitism, Hungary is a much more unpleasant place today than it was twenty years ago.”

Nevertheless, antisemitic incidents are uncommon in Hungary. Mainstream political parties are not antisemitic, but antisemitism is present on the extreme right of the political spectrum, which currently holds 17% of the national vote and 12% of the seats in Parliament.¹³ While the larger parties generally pursue Israel-friendly policies, on the far right there is much anti-Israel sentiment. The following is a description of the emergence and character of post-communist antisemitism by the editor of one of the Jewish magazines specializing in the subject:

“The earlier system did not tolerate antisemitism – and did not really tolerate Jewishness either. In the past twenty years, the Jewish community has striven to make up for the losses incurred by the communist era. In parallel with this, antagonistic feelings towards Jews have gradually become stronger. So, as Jewish life became bigger, richer and more prominent, so did antisemitic sentiment. As suppressed Jewish institutions suddenly began to flourish, and as suppressed Jewish thinking started to grow more freely, so suppressed antisemitism also began to thrive and flourish. Just as Hungarian Jewry often imported foreign Jewish ideologies which then appeared here on the Hungarian Jewish scene, antisemites similarly imported foreign antisemitic ideologies. These, too, are all booming. Antisemitism keeps up with the spirit of the age. In this sense, Hungary continues its own traditions: just as its Jews change, adapt and renew themselves, so does hate change, adapt and renew itself. The two walk hand in hand.”

In Hungary both ‘old’ and ‘new’ antisemitism are present, the latter in an anti-Zionist disguise, and there is a difference of opinion within the Jewish community as to the extent of the problem, and how best to respond to it. Some argue that Jewish organizations must take a strong stand against antisemitism; indeed, they ought to mobilize the Jewish community at every antisemitic occurrence. From time to time, the MAZSIHISZ does issue declarations drawing the attention of government bodies to antisemitic phenomena and asking them to intervene. However, the Jewish community does not have an institution able to monitor antisemitic phenomena or bring test cases when registering antisemitic occurrences (even though Hungarian law allows for this), so it has come in for some criticism in this regard.¹⁴ Within the community, the differences of opinion on antisemitism can perhaps best be seen in the context of the Hungarian Parliament passing a law prohibiting Holocaust denial: whilst the MAZSIHISZ supported the law, liberal groups within the Jewish community did not, regarding it as an excessive and counterproductive restriction of the freedom of speech. Liberals see the fight against antisemitism

13 Jobbik, or the ‘Movement for a Better Hungary,’ is a radical nationalist political party that has consistently been accused of being racist and antisemitic. In the Hungarian elections in 2010, it became the third largest political party in the Hungarian Parliament.

14 After 2000, the Hungarian branch of B’nai B’rith did publish reports on antisemitic incidents for a few years, but no longer does so.

in universal terms; their opponents argue that this perspective not only blurs the unique character of antisemitism, but is also ineffective as a basis upon which to combat it:

“[In these liberal Jewish circles] the response to antisemitism has been the conventional anti-racist outlook ... to fight racism, to fight exclusionism; ‘small is beautiful’, all minorities are beautiful. Let’s fight against homophobia, against the exclusion of the Roma, and in this context, we will, of course, also fight against the exclusion of the Jews. But it hasn’t really proved viable.”

In 2007, *Szombat* organized a conference and published a collection of studies entitled *Új antiszemitizmus* (New Antisemitism), in which contributors discussed the manifestation of antisemitism in guises of anti-Israel attitudes and anti-Zionism.

“At our conference entitled ‘New Antisemitism,’ the proceedings of which we also published in book format, we had 200 participants. It was a major event. From the point of view of the Jewish community, it would be a good thing for critical attitudes to be stronger; if people openly aired their critical views of the Jewish institutions and organizations. They don’t do so as yet, partly because they’re scared of antisemitism and partly because they feel, due to their sense of persecution, that Jewish organizations mustn’t argue with each other. As if they were different from all other human beings!”

During the course of our research, several respondents criticized the MAZSIHISZ for being insufficiently proactive in addressing the problem of antisemitism, and for often only taking a stance against antisemitic occurrences when it believed that this would serve the interests of the political powers on whose support it relied, namely, the left. Chabad, in contrast, was criticized for trying to play down antisemitic phenomena, also in the hope of political support from the right. Both criticisms draw attention to the absence of a Jewish position independent of day-to-day party politics. Furthermore, the focus group debated whether it was helpful to turn to foreign Jewish and human rights organizations when antisemitic incidents occur in Hungary, and several participants pointed out that this only increased the likelihood of party political manipulation.

There are some generational differences in attitudes towards antisemitism. Organizations that are mainly run by young people tend to hold rather different views from those run by older members of the community. First, young people evidently do not consider antisemitism a decisive factor in their Jewishness, and are less afraid of it than their elders are. Second, they have more faith in the possibility of achieving results in this area by taking a public stance and by using sound educational methods. Interestingly, our young respondents believed that the most suitable space for fighting antisemitism could be provided by new media. The Judapest blog functioned in this way while it was operational, and *Szombat* magazine has been experimenting with the idea of running a website to document antisemitic occurrences. Such endeavours, however, are unable to maintain a continuous presence due to the lack of stable income: Judapest no longer exists, and the website run by *Szombat* has hardly been updated in the past year or two. However, one of the most successful recent demonstrations against antisemitism in Budapest was organized by readers of the Judapest blog in 2007, in response to an antisemitic incident, and another one was organized in 2010 by a Facebook community, also consisting of young people. It was on the same premise that the Haver Foundation started one of its main activities: visiting non-Jewish schools and engaging students in dialogue about subjects that often come up in antisemitic discourse.

Whilst generational and political differences play their part in accounting for some of the debate around antisemitism, religious perspectives are also sometimes decisive. Whilst acknowledging the reality, a Chabad representative to whom we spoke was concerned about antisemitism dominating Jewish life and discourse, and argued that the community’s focus should be on far more positive aspects of Jewishness:

“Jews are mostly mentioned in connection with the Holocaust and antisemitism, real or imagined. These are, of course, very important subjects, but they do not contribute to a positive Jewish identity and do not present Judaism in a light that would reflect what it’s really all about. So these issues are not about Judaism, but about things that have happened, or are happening, to Jews. And that’s a huge difference. For us Jews, it is important not to cry antisemitism as soon as someone utters the

word 'Jew', or at least not to make that immediate association. At the same time, it is also important for the outside world to see that Judaism is not limited to this. I think we have achieved quite a lot in this respect, and not just us, of course."

Furthermore, the same respondent identified a clear distinction between the ways in which the younger generation and older generation see antisemitism:

"Why should Hungarian Jews be afraid? The Jews of Hungary today, especially the younger generation, but perhaps also our parents' generation, handle this issue with a lot more openness, and perhaps less anxiety, than twenty years ago, despite the fact that in the past two or three years antisemitism has, indeed, become more pronounced..."

As has been the case elsewhere in Europe, there can be little doubt that Hungary has experienced a recent rise of antisemitism. The challenge, as ever, concerns the extent to which the Jewish community should invest in monitoring and combating it, and the extent to which it should be actively incorporated into Jewish communal discourse and life.

4.12 Israel education, advocacy and *aliyah* (emigration to Israel)

There have been major changes in Hungarian Jewish attitudes to Israel since 1989. The establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the development of various forms of economic and cultural co-operation and the emergence in Hungary of Israeli firms, institutions and political organizations enabled many Jews to gain first-hand experience of Israel, to visit the country and to become involved in the activities of Israeli organizations. According to a 1999 survey, 53 per cent of Hungarian Jews had visited Israel, many of them more than once. This rate was even higher among young people and has most probably increased further since then.

The Sochnut (Jewish Agency) has been present in Hungary since the beginning of the 1990s. Initially, its main objective was to encourage *aliyah*, and it developed its programmes accordingly. However, the organization did not prove particularly successful in this regard, and only a relatively small number of Hungarian Jews

decided to settle in Israel. Many of the young people who began their university or other studies there, moved back to Hungary later on. Today the activities of the Sochnut are centred less around *aliyah* and more around educational programming, mainly for young people, designed to help them to become more familiar with the history and contemporary realities of Israel. Such programmes include Birthright Taglit and its successor programmes (Taglit Circles of Knowledge), the aforementioned 'Meeting of Generations,' and a variety of scholarship opportunities in Israel under the framework of the MASA programme. There are, at most, 100 Hungarian Jews participating annually in these programmes.

Established in 2010, the Israeli Cultural Institute of Budapest fits into the new strategy of the Jewish Agency and enjoys its extensive support. The idea is for the Institute to sustain itself from fundraising and to rely on local Hungarian resources as well. Its mission is to provide an insight into Israeli culture and society to the Jewish and non-Jewish public in Hungary; however, its main objective is the involvement of Hungarian Jews in Jewish life:

"My belief is that those who can be engaged, can do so through Israel and through culture. We can involve them through these two means and that's why we have created the Israeli Cultural Institute: because those who may not be interested in the Jewish thing may still be interested in Israel. They may not be interested in history or religion, but they are interested in culture. Who knows, maybe we'll succeed, and if not, there will be one more dead project. But I hope not. Israel is a normal country with an exceptionally progressive and multicultural arts scene. This is what we would like to present here. On the other hand, one of our main partners is the Jewish Agency, and the institution is headed by a dedicated Jewish educator. Therefore, our objective is, naturally, to try to reach out to that segment of the Hungarian Jewish population (roughly 90 per cent) whom no one has been able to engage before, and to arouse their interest in the Jewish community and Israel. This way we will perhaps be able to reconnect them to Jewish communal life, albeit by very loose ties."

However, when recalling the post-1990 emergence of Zionist organizations and evaluating the

processes that have taken place since then, our interviewee was a lot more sceptical:

“Back then it seemed that a sensible Zionist movement might take root in Hungary. Then it became clear fairly quickly that... the so-called Zionist boom was short-lived. It soon began to stagnate, then, after a while, to regress... Originally they started out with hundreds of participants; today they are on the verge of extinction. But even if they’re not extinct, their activity levels have become significantly lower, and they interest a lot fewer people.”

The editor of a Jewish magazine, who is highly active in Israel advocacy, told us that the attitude of Hungarian Jews to Israel is burdened with more problems today than it was during the years of political change:

“The way I see it, the relationship with Israel is undergoing a crisis today. There is a hard core who are very committed to Israel; this includes the leadership of the MAZSIHISZ, or even Chabad. There are no problems in this sense within the official Jewish institutional framework, but there is probably a problem when it comes to public identification with Israel. There have been nice gestures, like when during the Gaza war the Jewish organizations held a demonstration outside the Israeli Embassy. But solidarity with Israel is undergoing a crisis because they have managed to bring Israel’s integrity and legitimacy into question. The incredibly aggressive campaign which poses as a human rights movement but which really claims that Israel is a murderer, a murderer of children who kills humanitarian workers and those who bring aid, which depicts Israel as a monster and does so by using modern human-rights language – and then this appears not only in extreme ultra-left or ultra-right papers but also on the BBC and CNN and the covers of major newspapers – all this is a massive blow to the legitimacy and image of Israel. And it trickles down to the Jews of the diaspora as well. To be pro-Israel is not all that trendy; today Israel is not cool. The young generation cannot really commit to this solidarity because contemporary ideologies, those that young people would be happy to support, happen to be crying out against Israel. This crisis of values is reflected in the Hungarian Zionist Federation, which, by the way, has not had a leader for at least two years: it’s mostly made up

of youth movements who do their own thing but are not ready to make a public statement about being Zionists. This is a severe crisis, caused by the anti-Israel hysteria, to which Jewish communities elsewhere have also been unable to find a solution. In Hungary even less so, and therefore the relationship with Israel has also been undergoing a period of crisis.”

As far as the future is concerned, one of our interviewees voiced the following opinion in connection with Israel’s role in Jewish identity:

“I think that Israel will retain some of its significance, although to a lesser extent. In the sense that for my generation the 1967 war was like a lightning strike, a decisive moment... in that sense it won’t continue. Back then, and in the years that followed, we would listen to the (Hungarian programme on) Israeli radio every single day. Today that programme doesn’t exist any more. The way I see it, contemporary Jewish identity could have three pillars: the first is Jewish religion, and tradition – I mean tradition in a broader sense. The second is the relatively fresh memory of persecution, the Holocaust. The third is the existence and presence of the State of Israel.”

Participants in the focus group discussion agreed that identification with Israel was an important emotional component of Hungarian Jewish identity, but this did not mean that Hungarian Jewry could be won over *en masse* to support prevailing Israeli government policies. Such unity could only be imagined in one scenario: if anti-Israel attitudes were fuelled by antisemitism. Since, however, all of the mainstream strands of Hungarian politics are pro-Israel, and beyond Jobbik (see footnote 13), there are few, if any, anti-Israel political movements in Hungary that carry similar weight to those in the west, Jewish public opinion has not been overly preoccupied with this question. What is important, and increasingly so, is the role of Israel as a Jewish cultural focus; interest in Israeli culture seems to be on the rise. According to our discussion participants, one of the main tasks of Hungarian Jewish organizations is to create a bond between Israeli Jewish culture and Hungarian Jews.

Participants in the debate did not predict an increase in *aliyah* from Hungary in the near future. They maintained that this has also

been recognized by the Israeli organizations working in Hungary, who are therefore now placing more emphasis on strengthening the local community. While some Israeli organizations are present in Hungary – often only in a nominal sense and mainly to maintain their image back home - programmes such

as Taglit and MASA have had a remarkably positive impact as they have strengthened participants' identification with Israel, and encouraged these young people to use the experiences they gained in Israel in community building and communal activities back in Hungary.

5 Summary

Our individual and focus group interviews have born tangible results. Not only did they provide insight into the various successes, challenges and dilemmas of Hungarian Jewish communal life, they also accurately reflected the larger, structural problem underlying many of the current difficulties. Solving this structural problem seems to be the greatest challenge facing the future of the still sizeable Hungarian Jewish community.

Under the Hungarian legal and political system, unchanged since Jewish emancipation in 1867, Jews are defined as a religious denomination whose dominant Neolog strand is represented to the state by a single main organization. This organization today is the MAZSIHISZ, the only legally-entitled partner of the government in Jewish affairs, and the only distributor of government funding.¹⁵ What the representative of the community described in our interview seems to be true: in the decade following 1990, the full framework of Jewish institutions was developed, with major assistance from the MAZSIHISZ. Today this framework functions almost exclusively thanks to government funding, and is controlled by the MAZSIHISZ. This state of affairs creates a considerable amount of tension, because of the ‘emptiness’ within this rather spacious institutional system. This is partly because the MAZSIHISZ is first and foremost a religious institution, in stark contrast to most Hungarian Jews who, having had their ties to religion cut during previous generations, are today largely secularized and irreligious. Furthermore, the Jewish community, and particularly its leadership, lost a great deal of respect during the communist period, as a result of its often extreme collaboration with the system, and it has proved difficult to shake off this past. Although the majority of today’s community leaders did not play a leading role in the period preceding 1990, a degree of continuity is nevertheless visible on both a personal and institutional level. The lack of accountability and transparency that characterized

the old system are still present today, and clearly seen both by members of the Jewish community and the wider public.

After 1990, when it was becoming clear that no fundamental reforms were being carried out within the community framework, many hoped that the renewal of Jewish communal life would occur outside the system, among the newly emergent, independent Jewish organizations or the religious movements which were not associated with the MAZSIHISZ. However, following an initial period of boom and success, this process had come to a halt by the late 1990s. There are several reasons for this. First, it mirrors the wider trend in Hungarian society – towards the end of the first decade after 1989 there was a general decrease in the area of grassroots initiatives and social activities. Second, the illusion of an upsurge and the subsequent sense of decline was amplified by the fact that several foreign Jewish organizations, mainly from Israel and the United States, started to appear in Hungary to launch activities from 1990 onwards. These organizations rarely had even a minimal understanding of local conditions, and, as a result, their contact with Hungarian Jewry was limited and coincidental. Despite their noble intentions, much of their work seemed to focus on justifying their existence back home in order to increase their fundraising income. Following a brief and ineffective period of activity, these organizations soon closed down and disappeared from Hungary.

Other factors also account for the initial boom and subsequent decline. Whilst several organizations which were established in the immediate aftermath of 1989 have survived and continue to work to this day, the main challenge for most of them has been the stagnation, or even diminishing of their sphere of influence. Most of these organizations (the Zionist ones, for example), have been unable to create an organic relationship even with those parts of the Hungarian Jewish community that showed an interest in Jewish communal life around the time of the political transition. These organizations often followed political or social agendas that had no precedent in Hungarian Jewish life, and employed methods that were foreign and unknown. They tended either to employ foreign

15 It should be noted that in the newly-launched negotiations between the Hungarian government and particular Jewish organizations, Chabad holds the view that state funds for Jewish organizations should be apportioned among the different branches of the religious community according to 1% tax donations.

staff, or to rely on a small number of local activists, chosen from a very narrow circle, and the results proved highly detrimental to the quality of their leadership and to the efficacy of their organizational work. Their impact was still further diminished by the fact that as organizations functioning outside of the MAZSIHISZ structure, they could not rely on government funding, and the amounts they received from the budget of the MAZSIHISZ were often small and unpredictable. Thus, they had to rely largely on foreign resources to sustain themselves, which reduced their independence and often made them vulnerable to the expectations of 'head office'. Under such circumstances, these organizations tended to compete with one another for already limited financial, material and personnel resources. All these factors helped to create a situation in which the first generation of new leaders more or less completely disappeared from Jewish life, and the potential next generation had already become rather disillusioned with Jewish communal life by the time they might have otherwise stepped up to the plate. For the limited number who have done so, they have few, if any, role models to inspire them to continue their work for the long-term, and few, if any, attractive opportunities to remain involved with the Jewish community in a way that can be easily reconciled with their new life stage – building a career and starting a family.

However, the end of the Jewish 'renaissance' did not mean that the Jewish community regressed to its earlier state. In the twenty years since 1990, major changes have taken place in Hungarian Jewish society, which have resulted in a significant increase in the number of people who are willing to identify as Jews. This development is the result of the interplay of several factors. First, under the new political system, it has become considerably easier and simpler to choose and express one's identity than was the case previously. Second, in the past twenty years many Hungarian Jews have established contact with Jews abroad – in Israel, the United States and across Europe – and they have learnt about different patterns and ways of expressing Jewishness. Most importantly, they have learnt that being Jewish need not be a stigma, but can rather be a positive source of identity and meaning. Third, the number of people who have graduated from Jewish schools

since 1990 is likely to be over 1,000; as a result, a relatively young Jewish group has emerged that developed its personal networks and was generally socialized in a Jewish community context. Fourth, the waves of antisemitism that oscillate from time to time in Hungary often lead to an intensification of people's Jewish identity.

All of these factors have helped to create a broad network of mainly young Jews in Budapest whose members clearly identify themselves and each other as Jews. Their Jewishness informs their social lives, defines their political and cultural choices and is an important factor influencing their lives and careers. Nevertheless, the Jewish identity of this group is by no means secure; whilst elements of Jewish religion and tradition are present, they typically exist in the form of identity markers largely devoid of content, obligation or commitment. For this reason, the more traditional elements within the Jewish community tend to look upon this group – the 'ruin pubs crowd' – with disdain and resignation. In their eyes, this 'party Judaism' or 'festival Judaism' is an indicator of the failure of renewal and of further decline. On the other hand, it is precisely this crowd that the small, innovative initiatives of recent years – Haver, Marom, Judapest, etc. – have managed to successfully target. It may be that the success of these small organizations provides some evidence that there is room, after all, for building Jewish community within this environment. However, for all the reasons outlined above, the scope of these organizations is rather limited, and very few reach the higher levels of institutional development.

The general picture that emerges from the research shows a complete and structured system of Jewish organizations and institutions existing alongside a Jewish community which struggles to find – or perhaps is not even looking for – its place within this system, and thus accesses it only to a limited extent for communal purposes. The reason for the 'emptiness' of the Jewish institutional framework is not necessarily the total acculturation or irreversible assimilation of Hungarian Jewry, but is rather due to the absence of ties between the existing Jewish institutions and self-identifying, but unaffiliated, Jews. Our interviewees identified different reasons to explain this phenomenon, but they all agreed

that this tension was the greatest challenge of the next decade.

Indeed, whilst this report points to numerous policy ideas and challenges, the main priority for the future appears to be the need to build a bridge between these two distinct parts of Hungarian Jewish life: the Jewish institutional infrastructure and the majority of Jews living in the country. Indeed, addressing this issue seems to be the necessary precondition before which many of the other more specific problems can be addressed.

In the final analysis, there appear to be four major priorities in this regard, which together may create a new Jewish communal environment within which Jewish life could genuinely begin to thrive:

1 The MAZSIHISZ is in urgent need of reform

The MAZSIHISZ, the organization which represents the interests of Hungarian Jewry to government, and which holds responsibility for the distribution of government funds to Jewish community organizations, needs to be restructured in such a way that it is able to be far more responsive to, and in tune with, the needs, interests and behaviours of Hungarian Jews.

2 The entire institutional system of Hungarian Jewry should be restructured

In the longer-term, structural change is required in the entire institutional system of Hungarian Jewry to ensure that decisions on issues affecting the whole community will be made in a democratic and transparent fashion. In order to strengthen the effectiveness of Jewish community representation, Jewish organizations should work to build a democratically constructed umbrella organization which could enable them to develop common positions on key policy issues. Furthermore, new mechanisms are needed for distributing financial resources in an equitable manner, and particularly those coming from government ought to be distributed in a way that recognizes the contribution of all Jewish organizations, and that supports those initiatives best-placed to shape a positive future for the community. It may be that lessons could be learned from looking at the relative strengths and

weaknesses of umbrella bodies in other Jewish communities – e.g. CRIF, Board of Deputies of British Jews, etc.

3 Support is required to help build a religiously pluralist communal environment for Hungarian Jews

Hungarian Jewry is comprised of a high percentage of non-*halachic* Jews. This inevitably leads to a range of challenges concerning Jewish status. Creating a communal environment that welcomes and encourages multiple religious approaches will increase the number of gateways into Jewish life, and reduce the number of obstacles that deter many from becoming more involved.

4 The community needs to work towards much greater levels of co-operation and co-ordination between Jewish communal organizations and initiatives

There is an urgent need for an institutional framework that facilitates co-operation and co-ordination between the various Jewish communal organizations, that helps to avoid the duplication of efforts, and creates a stronger network of communal activity within which there is room for Jewish professionals to grow and develop. In order to achieve this, a principle of co-operation needs to become commonplace; investment is required now to begin to train a new generation of leaders who recognize that success in any part of the community should be regarded as success for the whole community.

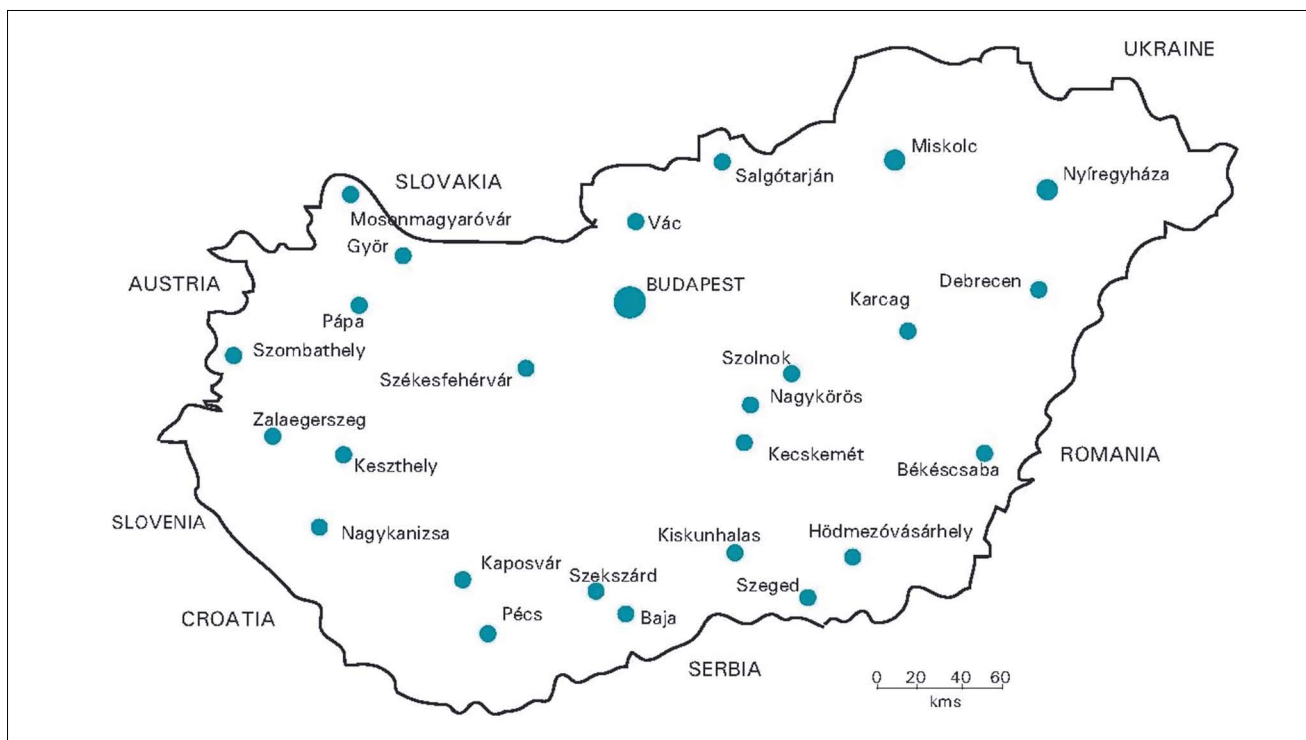
These four recommendations are all important issues at the heart of Hungarian Jewish communal life, and should be carefully considered by all those involved in shaping the community's future. However, in the spirit of this report, it is appropriate to give the final word to one of our respondents. Recognizing these issues, but giving them a unique personal spin, one of our interviewees concluded:

“It will be a challenge to try and create a mentality among the currently active Jewish leaders that emphasizes co-operation on the one hand and high quality on the other. We must insist that just because something is Jewish doesn't mean that it's worthy of existence. [We need] a well-planned education of the next generation, an investment in

the future generation to create useful leaders. And to reach a point where the organizations will try to achieve these goals coherently, by being aware of and supporting each other, and not by constantly playing dirty. If everyone did their own bit in their own little segment, but thought in terms of the

community as a whole ... even if this may not be advantageous to them, then in ten years' time there may be fewer Jewish organizations but they would be a lot more firmly grounded. The three things that we ought to focus on are co-operation, quality and leadership development."

Appendix A: Map of officially organized Jewish religious communities in contemporary Hungary



Appendix B: Jewish organizations in Hungary

1. Religious and communal institutions governed by the MAZSIHISZ

Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities (MAZSIHISZ)

Address: 1075 Budapest, Síp utca 12.
Telephone: (+36-1) 413-5500, 413-5564, 413-5575
Email: rozsa.katalin@mazsihisz.com,
drfeldmajerelnok@mazsihisz.com
Website: www.mazsihisz.com, www.mazsihisz.org

Neology

14 synagogue districts in Budapest
Prayer house at the hospice
28 communities outside Budapest

Orthodoxy

4 synagogues in Budapest

National Office of the Chief Rabbi

Address: 1084 Budapest, József krt. 27.
Mailing address: 1431 Budapest, Pf. 192
Telephone: (+36-1) 267-6388

Budapesti Zsidó Hitközség – Jewish Community of Budapest (BZSH)

Address: 1075 Budapest, Síp utca 12.
Telephone: (+36-1) 413-5500, 413-5569, 413-5575
Email: bzsttk@mazsihisz.com
Website: www.mazsihisz.hu

Budapest Rabbinate

Address: 1075 Budapest, Síp utca 12.
Telephone: (+36-1) 413-5580
Email: rabbitestulet@mazsihisz.com

Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives

Address: 1074 Budapest, Dohány utca 2.
Telephone: (+36-1) 413-5514, 413-5561
Email: info@zsidomuzeum.hu
Website: www.magyarzsidomuzeum.hu
Email: info@milev.hu
Website: www.milev.hu

Jewish Heritage of Hungary Public Endowment (MAZSÖK)

Address: 1054 Budapest, Tüköry u. 3.
Telephone: (+36-1) 269-1068, 269-1181
Email: mazzok@hu.inter.net
Website: www.mazzok.hu

2. Communities outside the framework of the MAZSIHISZ

Szim Salom Progressive Jewish Community

Mailing address: 1054 Budapest, Tüköry u. 3.
Telephone: (+36-1) 201-7648
Email: info@szimsalom.hu
Website: www.szimsalom.hu

Bét Orim Reform Jewish Community

Address: 1065 Budapest Révay u. 16.
Telephone: (+36 70) 310-2885
Email: info@betorim.hu
Website: www.betorim.hu

EMIH, Chabad Lubavitch – Jewish Educational Foundation

Address: 1052 Budapest, Károly krt. 18-20.
Telephone: (+36-1) 268-0183
Email: info@zsido.com
Website: www.zsido.com
Institutions: Beit Menachem Nursery and School,
Pesti Jesiva – Jewish Education Centre, Keren Or
Prayer House, Óbuda Synagogue (1036 Budapest,
Lajos u. 163)
Publications: *Egység* (Unity), *Gut Sábesz*

Pesti Súl Association

Established in 2001 with the aim of creating
a Modern Orthodox Jewish community in
Budapest.
Address: 1132 Budapest, Visegrádi u. 3.
Email: info@pestisul.hu
Website: www.pestisul.hu

3. Educational Institutions

National Rabbinical Seminary – Jewish University

Address: 1084 Budapest, Bérkocsis utca 2.
 Telephone: (+36-1) 317-2396
 Email: kocsis@or-zse.hu
 Website: www.or-zse.hu
 Library (telephone): (+36-1) 267-5415

Benjamin Nursery of the Budapest Jewish Community

Address: 1142 Budapest, Ungvár u. 12
 Telephone: (+36-1) 251-0577
 Email: info@benjaminovi.hu
 Website: www.benjaminovi.hu

Scheiber Sándor Grammar School and Primary School

Address: 1145 Budapest, Laky Adolf utca 38-40.
 Telephone: (+36-1) 221-4215
 Email: scheiber@scheiber.hu
 Website: www.scheiber.hu

Lauder Javne Jewish Community Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Vocational School

Address: 1121 Budapest, Budakeszi út 48.
 Telephone: (+36-1) 275- 2240
 Email: javne@lauder.hu
 Website: www.lauder.hu

American Endowment School

Address: 1075 Budapest, Wesselényi u. 44.
 Telephone: (+36-1) 322-5495
 Email: menedzser@aai.co.hu
 Website: www.aai.co.hu

BZSH Anna Frank Hall of Residence

Address: 1065 Budapest, Révay u. 16.
 Telephone: (+36-1) 353-4396, 311-9214
 Hall of residence for students of the American Endowment School, the Lauder Javne Jewish Secondary School and Scheiber Sándor Grammar School and Primary School as well as of the National Rabbinical Seminary – Jewish University. When they have free space they also accept students from other secondary schools.

Holocaust Memorial Centre

Address: 1094 Budapest, Páva u. 39.
 Telephone: (+36-1) 455-3333
 Email: iroda@hdke.hu
 Website: www.hdke.hu

4. Social Welfare Institutions

JDC: Hungarian Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee

Address: 1075 Budapest, Síp u. 12.
 Telephone: (+36-1) 269-6689, 269-6543
 Website: www.jdc.hu

Hungarian Jewish Social Aid Foundation (MAZS)

Address: 1075 Budapest, Síp u. 12
 Telephone: (+36-1) 889-9400, 352-0551
 Email: zoldi@jdc.hu
 Website: www.mazs.hu

Hospital

Address: 1145 Budapest, Amerikai út 53-55.
 Telephone: (+36-1) 273-5200
 Email: mazsihisz@szeretkh@datanet.hu
 Website: www.szeretetkorhaz.hu

BZSH Hospice in Újpest

Address: 1042 Budapest, Liszt Ferenc utca 7.
 Telephone: (+36-1) 389-2536
 Email: salom@interware.hu

Israel Sela Old Age Home

Address: 1042 Budapest, Liszt Ferenc utca 7.
 Telephone: (+36-1) 389-2536, 219-0910
 Email: torda.katalin@upcmail.hu

Seniors' Club of the Hegedűs Gyula utca synagogue district

Address: 1136 Budapest, Hegedűs Gyula utca 3.
 Telephone: (+36-1) 349-3120

Lipót Herman Seniors' Club

Address: 1075 Budapest, Síp utca 12.
 Telephone: (+36-1) 413-5500/112

Hunyadi Tér Seniors' Club

Address: 1067 Budapest, Hunyadi tér 3./
mezzanine
Telephone: (+36-1) 342-5322

Balatonfüred kosher hotel (only in summer)

Address: 8230 Balatonfüred, Liszt Ferenc u. 7.
Telephone: (06 87) 343-404
Contact details for reservations: 1075 Budapest,
Síp u. 12. (telephone: (+36-1) 413-5500/183)

5. Youth movements

UJS – Hungarian Union of Jewish Youth

The Hungarian member of the international organization UJS
Mailing address: 1075 Budapest, 5. Pf. 333.
Email: info@ujshu Website: www.ujshu

Hashomer Hatzair, left-wing Zionist youth movement

Re-established in 1989, was originally founded in Hungary in 1927.
Address: 1066 Budapest, Lovag u.5.
Email: somer.slicha@gmail.com, info@somer.hu
Website: www.somer.hu

Kidma, Zionist Jewish student organization

An organization for university students and graduates in their twenties.
Address: 1065 Budapest, Révay u. 16.
Email: kidma@kidma.hu Website: www.kidma.hu

Marom, Conservative religious Zionist student organization

Began as conventional Jewish student organization; now run the fringe cultural centre Sirály.
Mailing address: 1083 Budapest, Szigetvári u. 6.
Email: info@marom.hu, marommessage@gmail.com
Website: www.marom.hu, www.pilpul.net

Habonim Dror, Zionist youth movement

Has been present in Hungary since the 1930s and was re-established in 1989. Targets Jewish children and young people aged between 6 to 18.
Address: 1147 Budapest, Jávorka Ádám u. 15.
Telephone: +36 20 547 0304
Email: habonimdrorhungary@yahoo.com
Website: www.habonimdror.hu

Bnei Akiva, religious Zionist youth movement

Religious Zionist youth movement targeting children and young people between 8 and 18.
Mailing address: 1065 Budapest, Révay u. 16.
Email: bneiakiva@chello.hu
Website: www.bneiakiva.hu

Hanoar Hatzioni

Following 1989 the organization ran for a few years and was restarted in 1995. It targets young people aged between 12 and 17.
Mailing address: 1075 Budapest, Síp u. 12.
Telephone: +36 30 314 1947
Email: preiszler@gmail.com

6. Civic organizations

Hungarian Zionist Federation

Umbrella organization; a coalition of member organizations.
Mailing address: 1065 Budapest, Révay u. 16.
Telephone: (+36-1) 311-5412, (+36 20) 530-0614
Email: magyarorszagicionista@gmail.com
Website: www.cionista.hu

National Union of Forced Labourers (MUSZOE)

Address: 1062 Budapest, Aradi u. 62.
Mailing address: 1400 Budapest 7. PF. 220.
Telephone/Fax: (+36-1) 302-3077
Email: gyorgysessler@gmail.com

First Budapest Lodge of B'nai B'rith

Mailing address: 1065 Budapest, Révay u. 16.
Email: president@bnaibrith.hu
Website: www.bnaibrith.hu

Wizo Hungary Society

Mailing address: 1065 Budapest, Révay u. 16.
 Telefon: (+36-1) 311-9206
 Email: wizohungary@t-online.hu
 Website: www.wizo.org

Hungarian Jewish Cultural Union (MAZSIKE)

Set up in 1988, it was one of the first independent Hungarian Jewish civil organizations. Its journal is Szombat, Jewish political and cultural magazine.
 Address: 1065 Budapest, Révay u. 16.
 Telephone: (+36-1) 311-6665
 Email: mzsike@gmail.com, info@szombat.org
 Website: www.mzsike.hu, www.szombat.org

Jmpoint Foundation for the Jewish Community

Jewish Meeting Point is a Jewish community portal and social networking/dating site set up in 2002. On their website any Hungarian non-profit Jewish organization can advertise its events for free.

Mailing address: 1388 Budapest, Pf. 84.
 Telephone: +36 20 444 9492
 Email: info@jmpoint.hu
 Website: www.jmpoint.hu

Tokaj-Hegyalja Jewish Heritage Society

Address: 3910 Tokaj, Rákoczi u. 41.
 Email: kalmyy@enternet.hu
 Website: zsidohagyomány.fw.hu

Sófár Society

Jewish news portal on the internet
 Email: sofar@sofar.hu
 Website: www.sofar.hu, www.zsidonegyed.com

March of the Living Foundation

Address: 1075 Budapest, Síp u. 12.
 Information hotline: (+36-1) 413-5560
 Email: info@eletmenete.hu
 Website: www.eletmenete.hu

Memorial Society for Jewish Freedom Fighters

Address: 1074 Budapest, Alsóerdősor u. 22.
 Telephone: (+36-1) 352-9153
 Email: szabadsagharcos@freemail.hu

Menorah Foundation of Tiszafüred

Set up in 1995 to conserve the Jewish heritage of Tiszafüred and its surroundings.
 Mailing address: 5350 Tiszafüred, Csillag út 18.
 Telephone: +36 20 776 1180
 Email: orban99@gmail.com
 Website: www.timena.hu

Talmud Tóra Foundation

Supporting Jewish religious education and care for the elderly.
 Address: 1084 Budapest, Nagyfuvaros u. 4.

Haver Foundation for Informal Jewish Education

With the primary objective of liberal education, it offers informal educational programmes for schoolchildren.
 Mailing address: 1075 Budapest, Holló u.1. II. em. 34.
 Email: haver@haver.hu
 Website: www.haver.hu

Maccabi Fencing and Athletics Club

Address: 2039 Pusztafőző, Kmoskó u. 8.
 Email: info@maccabi.hu
 Website: www.maccabi.hu

Zachor Foundation for Social Remembrance

Educational organization teaching mainly tolerance and human rights.
 Website: www.emlekezem.hu, www.iremember.hu

7. The umbrella organization of Jewish organizations**Hungarian Jewish Congress**

Committees: Cultural-Educational, Health and Social, International Relations, Bereavement, Youth and Sport, Public Life and Against Antisemitism
 Telephone: (+36-1) 322-6405

This report is the first in the JPR series *Jewish life in East-Central Europe since the collapse of communism*.

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