

Article

Contemporary Jewish Genealogy: Assuming the Role of Former Landsmanshafts[†]

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Abstract: To understand the changing trends in Jewish Genealogy over the past 40 years, the author has interviewed more than one hundred genealogists around the world. All of them are connected to the two most important genealogy organisations, JewishGen and JRI-Poland. They range from hobbyists researching their own families to professionals researching specific prewar Polish shtetls and those serving the entire genealogical community. Based on their responses to 26 questions, the author has identified two important features of contemporary Jewish genealogy: its democratisation and institutionalisation. The democratisation of genealogical research has contributed to a great expansion of the field. The focus of interest is no longer limited to only rabbinical families but is also concerned with the common man. Thus, genealogists today speak not only on behalf of *sheyne yidn* and otherwise distinguished families but also on behalf of the millions of murdered „ordinary” Jews who once lived in Poland. The institutionalisation of genealogy refers to the degree to which genealogical research organisations like JewishGen or JRI-Poland now provide some of the same functions provided years ago by the *landsmanshaft* institutions. Today, descendants of a particular shtetl often discover and connect to each other through genealogical researchers and these genealogical organisations. How these Jewish genealogical practices can be/are used to strengthen the *landsmanshaft*-like function will be examined.

Keywords: Polish Jews; identity; micro-genealogy; macro-genealogy; *landsmanshaft*; genealogical community



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1. Introduction

This is an essay about *landsmanshaftn*, Jewish associations of people originating from common ancestral towns, and about genealogy.

Many years of interactions with Jewish genealogists related to past communities in Poland¹, and with local genealogists², have led me to contacts with *landsmanshaftn* in Israel and the United States³. This resulted in a number of very interesting research meetings. Questions posed to some of those genealogists were challenging and eventually helped them to define what genealogy meant to them, to determine if they felt part of a larger genealogy community, and, eventually, to define who they were.

Rafał Żebrowski pointed out that “(...) professional historians should monitor the phenomena which will certainly give new impetus to Jewish studies in our country and around the world”. Should historians be the only ones to do that? Indeed, Jewish genealogy sheds light on the *raison d’être* of many areas of discourse on memory, post-memory, Polish–Jewish relations, and, eventually too, on Hasidism, conversion, and the role and structure of the rabbinate. This sphere of activity of tens of thousands of Jews, which has not been analysed yet, constitutes a virtual world, around which the institution of Jewish genealogy is centred today, thanks to which it exists, and through which *landsmanshaftn* are being reconstructed today.

2. Methods

The research methods used in this project included interviews, observations, and a standardised questionnaire distributed in the JewishGen discussion group forum: soc.genealogy.jewish. Spatial and financial limitations prevented me from conducting enough in-person interviews, so I opted for the email questionnaire. The questionnaire was posted on JewishGen by Stanley M. Diamond M.S.M, founder and executive director of JRI-Poland. He also posted it to the JRI-Poland mailing list. Most of the questions in the questionnaire were open-ended, allowing for descriptive answers.

One hundred and seven questionnaires were returned, which were filled out by people affiliated with genealogical organisations or unaffiliated but performing their own genealogical research. The respondents include amateur and professional genealogists.

Most respondents reside in the United States of America or Israel. A large number also have university education, in contrast to their ancestors who mostly came from small towns and poor shtetl communities. A few shared memories of rabbinical connections in their families. Their ancestors either emigrated from Poland before World War II or survived the Holocaust.

I had limited contact with Orthodox Jewish genealogists. Two of them, from Borough Park, Brooklyn, for whom I worked as a local genealogist in Poland, offered to help, and I was able to visit the Yochsin Institute in Borough Park.

It should be noted that the institution of *landsmanshaftn* was not a strict goal of the survey. The primary purpose was to understand the process of becoming a Jewish genealogist participating in the larger Jewish genealogical community. Only four of the twenty-six questions on the questionnaire dealt with travel to Poland. However, the research observations and the respondents' answers led me to analyse the activity of the Jewish genealogists today in the context of the institution of *landsmanshaftn*, as described in this paper.

The following Table 1 illustrates the respondents' place of residence, Table 2 illustrates their education, Table 3 illustrates their generation (from which generation the respondent born outside of Poland belongs), Table 4 illustrates how many of them use JRI-Poland and the JewishGen website in their research, and Table 5 illustrates whether they consider themselves to be members of the genealogical community.

Table 1. The respondents' place of residence.

RESPONDENTS	PLACE OF RESIDENCE
66	UNITED STATES
11	ISRAEL
8	ENGLAND
7	CANADA
3	AUSTRALIA
2	FRANCE
2	NO INFO
1	RPA
1	GERMANY
1	SCOTLAND
1	SWEDEN
1	BELGIUM
1	POLAND
1	CHINA
1	ARGENTINA

Table 2. The respondents' education.

RESPONDENTS	EDUCATION
24	DOCTORATE
44	GRADUATE DEGREE
28	UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE
4	COLLEGE
3	HIGH SCHOOL
2	ENGINEER
1	TWO YEARS OF THE UNIVERSITY STUDIES
1	NO DATA

Table 3. The respondents' generation (from which generation the respondent born outside of Poland belongs).

GENERATION	1	2	3	4	1 and 2	2 and 3	1 and 5	BORN IN POLAND
RESPONDENTS	33	42	16	1	2	6	1	6

Table 4. How many of them use JRI-Poland and the JewishGen website in their research.

HAVE YOU USED THE JRI-POLAND/JEWISHGEN DATABASE IN YOUR PERSONAL RESEARCH OR TO ASSIST OTHER RESEARCHERS?	YES	NO	OTHER ANSWER	NO ANSWER
RESPONDENTS	98	5	2	2

Table 5. Whether they consider themselves members of the genealogical community.

DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU ARE A MEMBER OF THE GENEALOGICAL COMMUNITY	YES	NO	OTHER ANSWER	NO ANSWER
RESPONDENTS	67	27	11	2

3. Genealogy

Contemporary Jewish genealogy represents a domain where various analytical approaches converge. Genealogy encompasses multiple meanings, covering Jewish history from its biblical beginnings to rabbinical successors. It includes diverse practices adopted by both professional and amateur researchers seeking various genealogical sources, who simultaneously act as creators and participants in the compelling development of a genealogy community. Finally, this field has become a house for all sorts of institutionalised research expressed in the movement involving numerous genealogical associations and institutions. The democratisation of genealogical research (understood as popularised, or widely disseminated), has contributed to a great expansion of the field. The focus of interest is no longer limited to only rabbinical families but is also concerned with the common person. Thus, genealogists today speak not only on behalf of *sheyne yidn* and otherwise distinguished families but also on behalf of the millions of murdered "ordinary" Jews who once lived in Poland.

As Robotycki notes, the mental effect of such actions is the creation of a distinct genealogical knowledge paradigm, encompassing a system of professionals, their ethical standards, knowledge structures, and methodologies, along with institutions that unify and organise forms of expression.

Landsmanshaftn

The institutions, the existence of which is related to genealogical research, are the *landsmanshaftn*. This is a subject that has hardly ever been studied by Polish specialists in Judaic studies in recent years. It is difficult to find analyses of the broad spectrum of activities undertaken by *landsmanshaftn*; there is no information concerning various areas of their current activities, nor descriptions or analyses of their evolving structure.

Studying the environment of *landsmanshaftn* in France in the 1990s, Jonathan Boyarin realised that at that time, those associations were actively engaged in organising the funerals of their oldest members. The researcher noted that “despite the appearance of continuity created by institutions such as *landsmanshaftn*, their survival is not ‘natural,’ nor does their decline represent the exhaustion of some quantum of extra cultural energy brought along from the journey from home” (Boyarin 1997, p. 31).

The Zduńska Wola *landsmanshaft* is a good example⁴. With the death of its oldest members, the number of people participating in the annual ceremonies commemorating the Jews murdered during the Holocaust, which until recently took place in the Trumpeldor cemetery in Tel Aviv, has been steadily decreasing. The few survivors who were still alive tried to keep the fervour of life in the organisation. However, the interest and activities of other people gathered around the *landsmanshaft* were practically non-existent. Professor Olga Goldberg-Mulkiewicz expressed her conviction that after the old die, no one would cultivate the tradition of *landsmanshaftn*, and thus, they would be doomed to extinction. It seemed that such a fate awaited the Zduńska Wola *landsmanshaft* until its presidency was taken over in the early 2000s by Professor Daniel Wagner, an amateur genealogist at the time, who began to play an important role in the re-consolidation of the *landsmanshaft*.

Contemporary Jewish genealogy is becoming an increasingly institutionalised cultural phenomenon, yet it is still often overlooked by scientists as a phenomenon belonging more to “the realm of kitsch” rather than to “high art” (which should be dealt with by academics⁵). Such a stereotypical notion puts the research on genealogy into the background, and as a result, changes taking place in *landsmanshaftn* remain unnoticed. In this context, the attitudes of the individual should not be forgotten, nor should they be marginalised. Contemporary Jewish genealogists, who are also members and often leaders of *landsmanshaftn*, “are no longer just little old ladies in tennis shoes, as in the stereotype of hobbyists genealogists”, in the words of Gary Mokotoff (Mokotoff 2005).

As in the case of Zduńska Wola and Prof. Wagner—a genealogical “town leader”—the appearance of an institutionalised Jewish genealogy community can play an important role in maintaining the existence of *landsmanshaftn* in the future. Additionally, this example perfectly illustrates how the genealogy community can serve practical functions, constituting a base that enables maintaining cordial relations with other *landsleit*. In the past, members of *landsmanshaft*, motivated by the need for contact with *landsleit*, formed kinds of clubs and places for social gatherings (Goldberg-Mulkiewicz 2003, p. 28). In this way, they kept their collective identity. Additionally, as Sorin states, *landsmanshaftn*:

served as a sanctuary from the excessive strains of acculturation, ambition, and even ideology, and it gave the immigrants a breathing space, a place to be themselves, to continue the tradition of *tsedakah* and self-help but a place also to settle into a game of pinochle (...). The world of the *landsmanshaft* very much reflected the broader themes of American Jewish life and clearly was not a mere nostalgic ‘brotherhood of memory’. The *landsmanshaft* was a vehicle for a mutual aid, philanthropy, health service, insurance, credit and relaxation; and it was a way

station, an ingenuous social improvisation, from which immigrants could go on to confront the new society around them (Sorin 1997, p. 82).

The first immigrants settling in the New World needed a kind of “anchor” and safe haven that would retain them but also set out the framework of their new lives.

This role is partly being taken up by genealogists gathered around the two biggest web portals devoted to Jewish genealogy—JewishGen and JRI-Poland (Jewish Records Indexing). Having enjoyed freedom, diverse ways of thinking, and opportunities provided by post-modernism, they feel the need to get closer to the traditional Jewish community, which some of them had drifted away from. Most of the genealogists who took part in the survey were first- and second-generation descendants born outside Poland, and the vast majority have higher education and identify themselves as members of the genealogy community⁶. They practice their Jewishness mainly during major holidays, weddings, and funerals because it is dictated by tradition, not necessarily by faith. Therefore, the actual drift back to the Jewish community with all its religious and cultural background was possible only either through the Torah or genealogy or, as suggested by Artur Kurzweil, the Torah and genealogy.

Analysing the significance of Poland for American Jews visiting their ancestors’ homeland, Jack Kugelmass attempts to demonstrate that such visits represent secular tribal rituals. The term “secular” is used, as he explains, to distinguish it from the traditional ritual, which has a much more complex scope and nature. According to Kugelmass, a secular ritual appropriates only certain forms of traditional ritual and creates a new significance⁷. He also wonders what caused Eastern Europe (including Poland), despite providing an almost ideal staging background for such secular Jewish rites, to be discovered so late. Kugelmass draws attention to two important reasons for this state of affairs. He sees one of them in the trend for genealogical research, which began with the broadcasting of the TV mini-series *Roots* (Kula 2001, pp. 105–6). This, in turn, according to him, came upon a favourable ground in Poland. According to the American researcher, “East European countries (...) see Western tourism as a relatively simple way to generate income” adding that the subject of the Holocaust finally appeared as a matter of Jewish discourse, or as a secular religion of American Jews, as Jonathan Woocher called this phenomenon (Kugelmass 1993, pp. 422–23). Kugelmass focuses mainly on Jews arriving to Poland in groups whose primary purpose is to visit sites of the Holocaust. He characterises those visitors as follows:

There is something unique about Jewish tourism in Poland. **Jewish tourists see nothing quaint about the local culture** either Jewish or non-Jewish; their interest is the dead rather than the living. They go as antiquarians rather than ethnographers; **consequently, they bring back with them no experiences** that deepen their knowledge of the local culture. **The experiences they remember are likely to be those that enhance an already existing negative opinion**⁸ (Kugelmass 1993, pp. 410–11).

One needs to bear in mind that Kugelmass’ text was written in the nineties. The nature of Jewish tourists to Poland has gone through significant changes since then⁹. The groups of Hasidim (Kugelmass 1993, p. 402) and students mentioned by Kugelmass have been joined by another group—*landsleit*. Such groups are completely ignored by the author, although these groups had already been visiting Poland in the nineties. However, Kugelmass pays attention to the fact that many Jews undertake individual visits. According to him, they come mainly to Warsaw¹⁰, where they rent a car to go to the town where their family came from (Kugelmass 1993, p. 402).

Therefore, an expansion of Kugelmass’ discussion platform seems important. I suggest dividing visits to Poland into the following categories:

1. Group visits.

- 1.1. Youth groups travelling to Poland as part of tours organised by schools or travel agencies¹¹.

- 1.2. Youth groups travelling to Poland to participate in the March of the Living (Gruber 2004, pp. 161–62).
 - 1.3. Groups of Hasidim travelling to the graves of tzaddikim.
 - 1.4. *Landsmanshaft* organised groups, whose main purpose is to visit a particular city or town in Poland.
2. Individual visits.

A journey to Poland can mean different things to different people. For members of a particular *landsmanshaft*, these groups of Jewish tourists are organised groups wishing to jointly experience the places of origin of their ancestors¹². *Landsleit* wish to undertake a journey towards the truth about their ancestors but also get to know themselves better. The labyrinth of genealogical research, often researched before the journey, is to lead them inside their own axis mundi.

Let us examine this pilgrimage to their inner selves.

4. Case Studies

As noted, there have been groups of *landsmanshaftn* with roots in Ożarów (2001)¹³, Zduńska Wola (2007, 2023)¹⁴, and Zgierz (2009). All of them were the result of genealogical research undertaken by one of the *landsmanshaft*'s members. In the case of the Ożarów *landsmanshaft*, this person was Norman Weinberg, while in the case of Zduńska Wola *landsmanshaft*, it was Daniel Wagner. The example of the latter illustrates very clearly the different levels of fascination associated with searching for one's roots, as revived by "Polish Jews" over the last forty years. Wagner began his research in the late nineties as an amateur investigator not associated with any Jewish genealogy institution. Today, he is a member, among other organisations, of The Israel Genealogy Research Association and JRI-Poland, where he is co-ordinator and chairman of JRI Shtetl CO-OP for the towns of Zduńska Wola and Grodzisk Mazowiecki. Wagner recently became the Chairman of the International Institute of Jewish Genealogy, located in Israel.

In 2003, Wagner became the new president of the Zduńska Wola *landsmanshaft*. At that time, a handful of elderly people were present at the memorial in the Trumpeldor cemetery in Tel Aviv. However, after two terms of his presidency, the number rose to almost one hundred. With his genealogy approach and interest, Wagner seems to have reacted to the current needs of the Jewish community in general. He offered the Jewish descendants from Zduńska Wola another way of identification and participation in the life of the *landsmanshaft*. A similar activity was undertaken a few years ago by Jose Klingbeil, trying to re-consolidate through genealogical research the members of the Kutno *landsmanshaft*. At the very beginning of his work, the group consisted of 50 people. Klingbeil contacted Wagner via genealogical web portals, asking for help and advice on how he should proceed and what steps should be taken to reconstruct the group. Such a reconstruction of *landsmanshaft* groups can also be observed among the old Jewish communities of Będzin, Ożarów, Szczekociny, Zgierz, and Rymanów. Such examples can be multiplied, and they point to changes taking place in many such communities. This certainly illustrates a continuous process of change, which they are subject to.

The *landsmanshaft*'s visit to Zgierz was initiated by a current resident of the city from the Society for the Protection of Cultural Zgierz, who implemented the project of translating the Zgierz Yizkor (memorial) Book into Polish. For this purpose, she contacted the project manager of Yizkor Books at JewishGen.

Members of these groups (Ożarów, Zgierz, etc.) arriving in Poland consisted of people living in different countries around the world, including the United States, Canada, Argentina, European countries, Israel, and Australia, among others. What united them was the fact of having ancestors from the same town in Poland and direct or indirect contact with JRI-Poland or JewishGen.

It is worth noting that visits to Poland are often coordinated on-site by local associations or larger organisations focused on preserving Jewish heritage. In the case of Zgierz, it was the Society for the Protection of Cultural Zgierz. In Ożarów, the local coordinators

were Andrzej and Łukasz Omasta from PJCRP—the Poland Jewish Cemeteries Restoration Project, Inc. In Zduńska Wola, it was the Yachad historical society¹⁵, and in Szczekociny the visit was coordinated by local teachers.

The visits were similar in all the towns. The most important part was a meeting at the cemetery, where prayers were said. There, the local authorities and the representatives of organisations coordinating the visit gave speeches. Thus, the main and official celebrations open to everyone willing to participate were held in the cemeteries. In the case of Zduńska Wola, they coincided with the opening of a new cemetery gate. In Ożarów, the celebrations went along with the rebuilding of the entire cemetery wall and erecting a *matzeva* commemorating the Jewish community in Ożarów. In Zgierz, a monument in honour of the murdered was set up. In this way, such a visit was always connected with leaving a kind of physical trace. Some people also thought about personal commemorations of their loved ones. Mary Seeman from the Zgierz group wanted a commemorative plaque for her grandfather, Isucher Szwarc, who died in December 1939 in a vain attempt to protect his library collection from Nazi invaders. After several years of effort and with much help, in 2022, she managed to successfully install three *stolpersteine* (memorial stones) in the sidewalk in front of McDonald's, the former site of her ancestral home¹⁶.

When asked whether he left any trace of his visit to Poland, one respondent answered that his only purpose in leaving a trace was his contribution to the translation of the Zgierz Yizkor Book into Polish¹⁷. An old woman from the Zduńska Wola group, inspired by the activities related to the memory of the local Jews, decided to fulfil her dream. She wanted to set up a memorial for her family in the Zduńska Wola cemetery, whose members died during the liquidation of the ghetto and in the Kulmhof extermination camp. She had this idea in her mind for many years. However, she did not decide to implement her plans because she was afraid that the monument would be vandalised by the local people. Menachem Daum came to Poland in 2009, accompanied by students from the Shalhevet High School in Los Angeles. He took the whole group to Działoszyce, where his wife came from. While there, they symbolically restored the Jewish cemetery in the town:

On May 15th, 2009 I brought a group of Jewish high school seniors from the Shalhevet School in Los Angeles, accompanied by two Holocaust survivors, to Działoszyce where they were greeted by Polish students and teachers from the local high school as well as by students from Krakow's Jagiellonian University. Together we symbolically restored the town's Jewish cemetery by affixing 100 plaques with names of Jews buried there to the trees that now cover the cemetery. The genealogical information for these 100 plaques that enabled this historic event to take place was researched by Polish genealogist¹⁸.

Attempts to preserve the physical evidence of the presence of Jews (in this case, mainly cemeteries and synagogues) made by *landsmanshaftn* arise from the need to possess tangible items that would consolidate the *landsmanshaft's* sense of identity. As Yi-Fu Tuan wrote, each "homeland has its landmarks, which may be features of high visibility and public significance, such as monuments, shrines, a hallowed battlefield or cemetery. These visible signs serve to enhance a people's sense of identity; they encourage awareness (...)" (Tuan 1977, p. 159).

The need to belong to a *landsmanshaft* group is very strong among the people with whom the study was carried out. For example, another respondent was particularly interested in the organised meetings providing the opportunity to receive messages about the history of Zgierz, and she hoped to get to know other people having connections with the town¹⁹.

Since genealogical research constitutes an axis around which *landsleit* are focused, a visit of the whole group to the local registry office is an important part of a visit to Poland. Individual visits or visits by just a few families assisted by a local genealogist also take place. It depends on many factors, such as the attitude of local officials to such practices and the degree of expertise of the group leader in genealogical research. In Zduńska Wola, it was planned in advance and prepared thanks to Wagner's involvement in research on

the genealogy of the entire Jewish community of the town. Thanks to previously prepared material, the participants received copies of birth, marriage, and death certificates of their ancestors. There was also a meeting held with a long-standing employee of the office who shared tomes of records stored in the official archives and assisted Wagner during his earlier research work. Documents obtained from the registry office are often the only tangible trace of the life of one's family in Poland. Upon returning home, *landsleit* show these treasures to their families. For some *landsleit*, they become a basis for writing articles, which are later published in magazines issued by genealogical associations around the world, while others place them in family chronicles or as presents during the annual celebration of Passover. Some even use them to obtain Polish citizenship.

All meetings and ceremonies I attended for my research, with the exception of visits to the registry office and meetings with town authorities, were open to the public. Many local residents attended and asked about specific Jewish families who were their neighbours before the war, in the hope that they came with the group. In this respect, the visits differed from those of the nineties, which predominantly were closed, discrete meetings²⁰. During a visit in 2007, the members of Zduńska Wola *landsmanshaft* went to visit the houses in which their ancestors lived before the war. It was important to reach the "heart of the journey" either alone or in the company of only the closest family members or a local guide. Only there the final catharsis could take place.

It should be noted that, in the past, *landsmanshaftn* lived on their own. The members of the *landsmanshaft* in Israel rarely contacted, for example, members of the *landsmanshaft* in the United States. They were very distant associations in spatial terms. Today, this has changed: the time needed to cover the same distance is much shorter, typically mere minutes; *landsleit* only need to enter the address of the website dedicated to their town on ShtetlSeeker or send an email to the coordinator of the group. Bauman notes that "cybernating space of the human world has been imposed with the advent of the global web of information. (...) elements of this space (...) are 'devoid of spatial dimensions, but inscribed in the singular temporality of an instantaneous diffusion'" (Bauman 1998, p. 17).

The boundaries between *landsmanshaftn* of the same town have become fluid and often only conventional. Slowly, these organisations are beginning to function as one unified community of *landsmanshaft*, or parallel in two ways: as traditional *landsmanshaft* and as the one functioning on the Internet²¹. Therefore, next to the real life of a *landsmanshaft*, the life of a cyber-*landsmanshaft* goes on. And, as pointed out by Alessandra Guigoni, although the cyber-world is not identical to the real world, it allows people to function not only in a cognitive but also in an emotive way (Kuzma 2008, pp. 48–49).

Engaging collectively in family research allows Jews to construct a genealogical pattern that legitimises them as a long-standing nation and positions them in history as an autonomous entity within a larger context.

Most of the group consists of representatives of the first and second generations born after the Holocaust. Among them, there are a few survivors—witnesses of history: their aim is to legitimise the stories of the life of their ancestors. As noted, organising *landsmanshaftn*'s visits is now preceded by intensive genealogy research conducted by a group coordinator, who is an emissary of a given *landsmanshaft*, during his or her previous visits to Poland or with the help of a local genealogist. Genealogical research could be focused mainly on one's own family, as in the case of Norman Weinberg²², or on the genealogy of the entire Jewish community of a town or city. The latter was and still is conducted by Daniel Wagner. It results in research projects carried out based on the collected data²³. As seen in other towns (Kutno or Szczekociny²⁴), genealogists, initially driven by the need to know their roots, over time become the leaders of *landsleit* scattered in the diaspora. Their search for family becomes the search for other people from the same town. In this way, they contribute to the consolidation of *landsleit* and generally support the institutions of *landsmanshaftn*. It happens that some *landsleit* travelling to their place of origin start exploring the history of their own family only after visiting the town of ancestors, motivated both by the stories of their fellow *landsleit* and by direct contact with the landscape in which

their ancestors lived. Homeland landscape is, as Yi-Fu Tuan puts, (...) personal and tribal history made visible. The native's identity—his place in the total scheme of things—is not in doubt, because the myths that support it are as real as the rocks and waterholes he can see and touch. He finds recorded in his land the ancient story of the lives and deeds of the immortal beings from whom he himself is descended, and whom he reveres. The whole countryside is his family tree" (Tuan 1977, pp. 157–58).

After a visit to the town of his ancestors a participant of the reunion of *landsleit* from Zgierz, wrote: "I felt it was part of who I am even though I was not born there"²⁵. A Respondent, who visited Poland with a group that was not exactly composed of *landsleit*, but still was organised (and guided by his cousin), expressed his feelings in this way:

My head is in England—but part of my heart lies in the soil of Poland, in the souls of its people—the country of my parents and their parents for perhaps hundreds of years. Although I was born, educated and have lived most of my life in England—part of my soul has its roots in the soil of Poland—perhaps with my ancestors. It is a very strange feeling I have in my psyche—I feel that I belong to Poland—a country whose language and customs I do not know²⁶.

Another respondent wrote that she simply wanted to take a walk in the places where her grandparents walked. "Regain THEM somehow". It was an effort to find the missing part of what the respondent is²⁷. Menachem Daum, whose family come from Zduńska Wola, says:

Somehow when I step into a Jewish cemetery in Poland I feel much more viscerally connected to my ancestors than I ever had standing at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. It is much more difficult for me to relate to King David of 3000 years ago than my grandparents who lived in Poland²⁸.

Meetings of the group leader with the rest of *landsleit* usually take place earlier, before leaving for Poland, either via the Internet or in person (if they live in the same country or, if it is possible, through trips made by the leader) and by participating in annual genealogy conferences. The latter seems to be especially valuable. Current relations between members of the various *landsmanshaftn* are much closer than, for example, twenty years ago. Some people coming from a given town in Poland are aware that such an association existed or still exists in their country, but they have never taken part in its activities. The level of self-identification and belonging to the Jewish community is limited to the fact that they just know that they are Jews. However, over the course of time, they turn to their past and see a gap, often unspoken by the family soon after experiencing the trauma of the Holocaust; later on, in the hustle and bustle of everyday life and because of the fragility of memory, the thin thread connecting them with the history of their family is lost. Emissaries—group leaders—therefore find fertile ground for the development of genealogy research that may benefit the *landsmanshaftn* groups, especially now, when the last witnesses of that pre-war Jewish Poland are still around to be interviewed. It is a necessary element of a transmission belt between the generations. The vast majority of genealogists involved, like Wagner, in reconstructing *landsmanshaftn* are middle-aged people, born after the war or just before its outbreak, and mostly, they are secular Jews²⁹.

Conference meetings of people from the same town give them another opportunity to maintain a permanent bond and, in this way, build a common identity. Contemporary society, as Kaja Kaźmierska states, has broken a natural bond with the past as a result of the transition from continuity to change (Kaźmierska 2007, p. 8). Today, people are trying to commemorate the past. Actually, Pierre Nora provides an example of Jewish identity: according to him, it is no longer built on rooting in the past understood as being rooted in a tradition of certain values, especially religious values, which were once the basis for its formation. Currently, we are dealing with a very vague definition of tradition, which has no other history apart from its own memory. In this case, being a Jew means as much as remembering that you are one (Ricoeur 2007, p. 536; Kaźmierska 2007, pp. 9–10). Thus, the tendency of non-religious Jews to approach the tradition of their re-

religious great-grandparents, and sometimes, even to approach the Jewish community in general, becomes noticeable. Daniel Wagner notes:

Genealogy gives another perspective to your existence as a man, and in this case it helped defined me as a non-religious Jew who enjoys Jewish traditions. It re-scaled my relation to my family. It gives a deeper sense of the time that passes. It gives a meaning to the word 'memory'. It allows the meeting of different minds because genealogists have different backgrounds, languages, religious convictions, skin color, traditions, etc., but a common goal.

Some genealogists take on a greater interest and appreciation of religion based on their own research. In some cases, it leads down a path to Orthodox Judaism. An example of such a case is Arthur Kurzweil. He believes that research into his family helped him become who he is today. Once more Jewish by culture, today a religious Jew—he went through a metamorphosis. He describes this transformation in the following words:

Some of you have known me long before I put the yarmulke on my head or long before a lot of changes happened in my life. I would say without a shadow of doubt that it was my genealogical research that affected me like Kafka's *Metamorphosis*—you know, one morning you wake up and you're a cockroach! I hated those Orthodox Jews, and one morning I woke up and I realized that I was part of them (Kurzweil 2004, p. X).

Kurzweil echoed such a sentiment: "I didn't know it when I began my research, but my search for information about my family history was really, at its core, a yearning for Jewish identity".

Such a common experience during *landsleit's* visits to the land of their ancestors seems to stimulate researchers, town leaders, and entire *landsmanshaftn* to even greater "genealogical effort". The collective genealogical experience shapes individual feelings and has a significant impact on furthering one's development of family research. As Szpociński sees it, a genealogical conference is "one of the ways to be faithful to the ancestors and save the values for posterity" (Szpociński 2008, p. 135).

Analysing the attitude of a *landsmanshaft* in Israel, Olga Goldberg-Mulkiewicz pointed out that "this problem is viewed differently in *landsmanshaftn* operating outside the state of Israel" (Goldberg-Mulkiewicz 2003, p. 29). Jonathan Boyarin, who studied the community of a *landsmanshaft* of Polish Jews in Paris, presented this in the following way. According to him, Poland is a nostalgic home to Polish immigrants in Paris. Their home in everyday life is France, while Israel remains the ideological homeland (Boyarin 1997, pp. 19–20). Boyarin conducted research mainly on the *landsmanshaftn* of Warsaw, Radom, and Lublin. Most of his respondents were born in Poland. As he points out, they were groups of elderly people (Boyarin 1997, pp. 8, 194).

Analysing the returns of Jews to their birthplaces and childhood hometowns, Goldberg-Mulkiewicz noted that "they break with the tradition to isolate the Jewish community in a town". At the same time, "they give visitors a sense of completion, leading to the ultimate ending of both tangible things remaining after the Holocaust of Jewish communities, and one's own links with that world" (Goldberg-Mulkiewicz 2003, pp. 41–42). Visiting the town of his birth, Zduńska Wola, Aszer Ud Sieradzki said: "Since heaven helped me during the hardships, I decided that I should bear witness to what happened to the Jews in Zduńska Wola to future generations (Klauzińska 2003, p. 186).

His arrival to the town was a kind of settling the account with the past. The visit deepened his ideological bonds and strengthened his community spirit (Klauzińska 2003, pp. 186–87). What then drives the *landsleit* born after the war and beyond Polish borders? As Menachem Daum puts it:

Poland was always a fascinating but a forbidding place. My parents had no interest in returning and my father tried to discourage me from going. It just seemed like a sad place of utter destruction. But when I heard Rabbi Carlebach

was going I felt his presence and his songs would make Poland bearable. I was not disappointed.

He adds:

But perhaps what had an even bigger impact were the stories my mother told me about her growing up as a young girl in a magical place in her memory named Zduńska Wola. It was clearly the best time of her life. When she would tell these stories she would smile and be happy, which was rare for her. Her life after Zduńska Wola was very sad as she lost her first husband and son and nine brothers and sisters during the Holocaust. So for me Zduńska Wola became like Camelot before everything changed. My father also comes from Zduńska Wola but his fondest memories were not so much of what happened in ZW but rather stories of his pilgrimages to Góra Kalwaria to be with his Hasidic master. When my parents would tell me these stories the world was whole again. Perhaps part of my interest in genealogy was to reach back over the Holocaust and re-connect to that time and place before the world went mad³⁰.

Camelot Castle, the Arthurian seat of the King's court, was also a symbol of order in the chaos, an ideal state standing in opposition to anarchy. Daum's journey to Poland was therefore a return to the lost paradise, which he had never been able to experience, the lost paradise of his mother's family and ancestors. We can see here the romanticisation of the past, which becomes manifested paradise, as Ewa Domańska says (Domańska 2005, p. 275).

As noted, Jack Kugelmass wrote that the Jews visiting Poland are not interested in anything apart from the sites of mass death and therefore they do not see anything particularly interesting in local history, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Consequently, they **do not** bring back experiences that would deepen their knowledge of the local culture³¹. According to Kaja Kaźmierska, "Poland is becoming a real part of the collective history supporting the identity and a designatum of a certain symbolism. The stories told by grandparents and parents cease to be a myth enchanted in the mysterious town names. Own experience makes their feelings real. (...) As a site of the Holocaust [Poland] is also a 'secular vision of hell', a negative centre (...), becoming in this way a cautionary cultural text" (Kaźmierska 2008, p. 201).

Daum's words seem to contradict such a perception of Poland. Susan Welsh says that genealogical research has given her greater self-awareness and interest in countries such as Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, where her family comes from³². Fay Bussgang said "Since 1989 and our first trip to Poland, genealogy and Polish-Jewish relations have been my main interests"³³. Some of the respondents to the survey believe that thanks to their family search, they became more proficient in historical research³⁴ or that their interest in the history of Polish Jews increased³⁵. Some of these researchers, like Howard Orenstein, Norman Weinberg, Daniel Wagner, and Jose Klingbeil, are involved in rededications and renovations of Jewish cemeteries and erecting monuments in these compounds.

Stanley M. Diamond M.S.M, founder and executive director of JRI-Poland, writes:

My interest in genealogy has changed my life in countless ways. In the study of family history, I have learned much about history and geography, and of life in Poland and surrounding countries. Today, the towns in Poland in which Jews lived are as familiar to me as the cities and towns in Canada³⁶.

Rhoda Miller believes that genealogy has strengthened her sense of Jewishness and created a relationship with the Holocaust, which she never had before. She has been researching the Holocaust since that time, and she taught a university course on this subject³⁷. Isak Gath has learnt to read Polish and Russian documents to be able to conduct his own research in archives in Poland³⁸. When Daniel Wagner arrived in Poland for the first time in 1999 to discover the secrets of his own family, his visit started with getting off the train and heading to a taxi³⁹. There, he was strolling along a line of cars closely studying the drivers and wondering which of them would not be anti-Semite. A few years later, when

asked whether he feels like a member of a genealogical community, he said: “Yes, we are a huge family. It includes also the Poles that I’ve met. JewishGen and JRI-Poland are the most wonderful projects on Earth because they connect people”⁴⁰.

As the above-mentioned examples show, “(...) the past refracts differently in each individual experience” (Kapuściński 2003, p. 15). Therefore, joint visits of those born outside Poland are aimed at developing collective memory, through which they will be able to build themselves and create their own identity as a *landsmanshaft* (Kapuściński 2003, p. 19). Although their ancestors are already dead, and in some cases, they never met them, *landsleit* will fill this gap. Nevertheless, if the memory is to last, you have to constantly repeat and remember a story, you need to re-initiate the entire system of signs, symbols, and practices, which are often forgotten, and which were practised by your parents. Remembering, however, means not only the storage of knowledge and memories but also their evaluative selection, as Dariusz Czaja says (Czaja 2003, p. 76).

Some residents of towns visited by Jews also inspire and encourage *landsleit* to discover their roots and explore Poland. Mark Halpern said: “1996. I was on a business trip to Poland and decided to visit my mother’s birthplace, Bialystok. My guide, (...) planted the seed for searching my roots”⁴¹.

Both communities, the descendants of former residents and the current residents of the towns, often work jointly on the protection and renovation of old Jewish heritage sites. Both of these groups break down the barriers that could potentially divide them.

The visits of organised groups of *landsleit* are a way to sustain the identification and, at the same time, to participate in the life of the *landsmanshaft*, in which, until then, there was no opportunity to participate. The ties between *landsleit* and their descendants loosened over time; sometimes they were completely obliterated. Consolidating the group through visits to the town of origin a specific town, constant contact via the Internet with JRI-Poland town’s leaders, and creating Family Finder, as well as focusing on JewishGen projects, such as Yizkor Books or ShtetlSeeker, genealogists, in a way, reaffirm continued existence of *landsmanshaftn*. Such activities are necessary for the Jews coming from one town to feel unity and to strengthen their ties. As Kugelmass remarks, “(...) without bodily practices tribal memory cannot be maintained” (Kugelmass 1993, p. 429).

The practice of joint arrivals based on genealogy and mythologisation of the ancestors aims to consolidate the identity of a *landsmanshaft*. As Margaret Mead claimed, “The continuity of all cultures depends on the living presence of at least three generations” (Mead 1970, p. 2). In the case of *landsmanshaftn*, this continuity was disrupted by the Holocaust. The oldest *landsleit* born in Poland are currently passing away. The second and third generations⁴², which include the majority of Jewish genealogists, have realised that this is the last time that they can save the ark of *landsmanshaft*. They continue to preserve the memory of the towns from which their ancestors originated. Collecting all existing documents and traces related to individual families, but also to entire Jewish communities of Polish towns, they are trying as hard as they can to embed themselves in the trajectory of life and create a solid bridge between the past and the future.

5. Conclusions

Genealogists/town leaders contribute to the fact that today, the existence of *landsmanshaftn* scattered in the diaspora is largely based on new technology: the Internet. However, it was long ago when the anthropologist Margaret Mead noted that technical inventions, when they take the form of institutions, often bring irreversible changes to the nature of a culture. Indeed, the institution of Jewish genealogy is constantly undergoing transformation. It has come a long way since the days when the main determinant of creating a genealogical lineage was a high social status: today, anyone can easily create his or her own genealogy almost without leaving home. We will have to wait for possible larger changes, which *landsmanshaftn* may be subject to. Undoubtedly, they will be influenced by changes in the way Jews approach genealogy, and this seems to be an “island” that constitutes an extremely important and enduring element that has been at the heart of Jewish culture for

millennia. Even though this “island” disappeared beneath the surface of the Holocaust, it has reappeared and remains the same “island” with new levels of reality. Consequently, the duration of Jewish genealogy is constant, and the rebirth of *landsmanshaftn* is one of the effects of the changes that take place within this genealogy.

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Notes

- ¹ It refers to the genealogists of Polish Jews. By “Polish Jews”, the author means people who have their roots in Polish territory, including the lands now belonging to Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine. Excluding those areas would be artificial. Therefore, referring to the Polish Jews today, one must remember the internal diversity of this community and the full range of contrasts, thanks to which nowadays we can distinguish Galician Jews, Litvaks, and Ukrainian Jews. Jewish genealogists often explain that their family came from Poland, but today, many of these places belong to, for example, Belarus. Still, in their family memory, the town that grandparents came from was Polish and continues as such in the stories. The most of respondents, however, are now residents of the United States, Israel, and Europe. Polish Jews were a highly diverse community, starting from Hasidim to Misnagdim, Zionists, Agudists, and Socialists. Eventually, living in a small town or, on the contrary, in a large, developing city, was not insignificant for the history of individual Jewish families.
- ² Genealogical research in Poland is conducted by dozens of local researchers, who tend to focus their attention on the region in which they live, but of course, this is not a rule. They work mainly in Warsaw, Łódź, Kraków, Białystok, and other places. Often, they remain in regular contact with JRI-Poland and the Jewish Historical Institute Genealogy Department in Warsaw. A local genealogist seems to be a very interesting and important figure for the entire process of contemporary Jewish genealogy because he or she coordinates the interactive network in the process of organising a trip to Poland and the whole genealogical structure. Local genealogists sometimes become one of the creators of modern genealogy. Conducting research into a particular family, a local genealogist often establishes contacts of almost transcendental dimension, becoming a link between the past and the present. Thanks to her or him, these two time spaces become one, and the decision of Jewish families to have their roots studied by an outsider becomes, at the same time, a kind entry and letting the genealogist into their family home.
- ³ In Yiddish, the term *landsleit* refers to an acquaintance or someone from the same town or area. Of course, such kinds of associations exist not only in the two countries mentioned in the text but also in all of Europe and Australia, which is where the Jewish diaspora is the most numerous.
- ⁴ Zduńska Wola *landsmanshaft* was one of the first established in Israel after the war. The former residents consolidated there as early as 1946. In the United States, Zduńska Wola *landsmanshaft* was established in 1902. Cf. (Wola 1952). New York, collection No. 341: Records of First Zduńska Wola Benevolent Society, catalogue No. 808.
- ⁵ Historians especially were and often still remain rightly sceptical about the religious sources of Jewish genealogy, the credibility of which aroused many doubts. The reasons for these doubts are obvious: In Israel, the appropriate lineage has always legitimised performing relevant functions. It was connected with religious commandments and the need to belong to a particular tribe, clan, family, home, or even—according to Laredo—a tent. By belonging and the continuity of origin, the people of Israel created and consolidated dynastic structures. For many rabbinical families, it was important to maintain the mythical yichus derived from King David, which was often achieved by falsifying their true origins. *Vide* (Laredo 1978).
- ⁶ Among the 107 respondents, there are 24 PhD holders, 44 people holding a university degree corresponding to the title of MA from the Polish education system, and 28 people holding a degree corresponding to BA. According to the survey, 67 of 107 respondents answered that they feel similar to members of a genealogy community.

- 7 As an example, Kugelmass notes the visit of the United Synagogue Youth group in Treblinka. Its members prepared pieces of paper with letters to each of the people murdered in the camp. Then, they scattered them on the camp premises. As Kugelmass reports, this act was similar to putting *kvitelach* on the graves of *tzaddikim* practised by Hasidim. *Vide.* (Kugelmass 1993).
- 8 Bold by the author.
- 9 Such changes have also been pointed out by Ruth Gruber. *Vide* (Gruber 2004).
- 10 It is usually Warsaw or Kraków, which are cities with main international airports.
- 11 The main purpose of such trips is to places connected with mass death, like Auschwitz-Birkenau, Majdanek, Treblinka, the Radegast station in Łódź, etc. Such visits have already been analysed by researchers in terms of *thanatotourism* (dark tourism). *Vide* (Tanaś 2006; Muszel 2007).
- 12 I do not analyse *landsmanshaft* groups from large cities such as Warsaw, Kraków, and Łódź. These cities constitute the intellectual and financial centres of the country. Local *landsmanshaftn* from these large centres have been organising group visits for a much longer period, and their agenda was very different than in smaller towns, the former shtetls. To a large extent, it was dependent on the policies pursued by individual cities. Warsaw, Kraków, and Łódź were among the first cities in Poland to begin to organise ceremonies commemorating the liquidation of the local Jewish ghettos. The *landsleit* of the big cities often visit their hometowns around dates commemorating the most terrible moments for the Jewish people during the Second World War. Such events continue to attract a number of former residents and their descendants. The main aim of their visit is to pay their respects to the murdered Jews.
- 13 The group of former residents of Ożarów came back to Poland in September 2011. The visit was organised due to two facts. That year, ten years had passed since the previous visit of former residents of Ożarów. The second reason was to hand over a petition to the Embassy of the German Embassy. The former residents visited Tykocin and Treblinka, where most Jews from Ożarów were killed. They also went to Ożarów, where a ceremony to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the rededication of the cemetery was held. A meeting with the mayor of Ożarów also took place. In the cemetery, the ceremony included the opening of a newly built ohel. The ceremony was led by Rabbi Tanchum Becker from Israel. *Landsleit* spent a day in the town of their ancestors, which culminated with a walk around the town and key Jewish historical sites. The group was guided by the mayor of Ożarów, Marcin Majcher. After that, the group moved to Tarłów, where a ceremony rededicating the Jewish cemetery was held. Thanks to the initiative of PJCRP—Poland Jewish Cemeteries Restoration Project, Inc.—the cemetery was fenced and tidied up. Other places visited by the group included Łosice, Sandomierz, Kraków, Łódź, and Warsaw. Additionally, for interested visitors, trips to Auschwitz and Wieliczka were organised. The group included 22 people, but only half of them decided to visit the museum in the former Auschwitz death camp. The arrival of Ożarów *landsmanshaft* members was organised by Norman Weinberg together with PJCRP, which he founded. Weinberg's example shows how far genealogists' actions can reach in many cases. Weinberg began with genealogical research into his own family and then established contacts with other *landsleit* of Ożarów. His interests and research resulted in founding PJCRP and taking up projects aimed at restoring other Jewish cemeteries in Poland. At the moment, works have been started or already finished in almost thirty cemeteries. During Weinberg's group's visit in September 2011, PJCRP handed the German ambassador in Poland a petition to the German government for help and financial assistance for the restoration of cemeteries and commemorating the mass graves of victims of the German Nazis. That petition had already been signed by numerous organisations in Poland and around the world and mayors of various Polish cities and towns, as well as individuals.
- 14 Members of Zduńska Wola *landsmanshaft* visited their hometown (as an organised group) for the first time in 1946. During that visit, the decision was made to bring to Israel the ashes of their loved ones murdered during the Holocaust. According to Olga Goldberg-Mulkiewicz, they were shipped to Haifa, where a solemn funeral and procession through the city was organised. The *landsmanshaft* members came to Zduńska Wola for the second time in 1990. The group was made up of three people out of a few dozen who survived the Holocaust: Katriel Klein and Dawid Lewi from Israel (who died in 2011) and Bolesław Sieradzki—the only survivor living in Poland (who died in 2011). The visitors attended a meeting with the mayor, the chairman of the town council, and the director of the local museum. They were given a plaque dedicated to the Jews from Zduńska Wola. Then, they went to the Lokator community centre, where an exhibition dedicated to the Jewish community was prepared. A closed meeting was held there, which was attended by around thirty people. In 1994, a group of fifty-eight former residents and descendants of Zduńska Wola visited the town again. There were people from Israel and the United States. Almost all the participants of that reunion were born before the war in Zduńska Wola. The main aim of their visit was to commemorate the murdered Jews. The visitors were accompanied by the Chief Rabbi of Poland, Pinkas Menachem Joskowicz, also born in Zduńska Wola. The participants met with the town authorities and recited a prayer in the Jewish cemetery at the memorial to the murdered. The monument had been commissioned to a local company by the *landsmanshaft* a year before. The group also visited the town museum. After the visit to Zduńska Wola, they went to Chełmno, Kraków, Auschwitz, Lublin (Majdanek), and Warsaw. Information on the visits comes from the following sources: *The Chronicle of the Jewish Cemetery* kept by Elżbieta Bartsch beginning in 1984 (archives of Elżbieta Bartsch) and a film showing the visit of Aszer Ud Sieradzki to Poland (archives of the author). *Vide* (O. Goldberg-Mulkiewicz 2003), *Stara i nowa ojczyzna ...*, p. 32; *Vide* (Yizkor Book of Zduńska Wola 1968), Tel Aviv, p. 448.
- 15 Established in 2004 as the Committee for the Renovation of the Jewish Cemetery in Zduńska Wola and beginning in 2006 as the Yachad historical society. The society was disbanded in 2012.

- 16 Questionnaire No. 73 (all questionnaires come from the author's archives).
- 17 Questionnaire No. 58 (anonymous respondent).
- 18 Questionnaire No. 74.
- 19 Questionnaire No. 57 (anonymous respondent).
- 20 A few years ago, one of the Zduńska Wola descendants, who does not belong to any of the genealogical organisations, became the president of the Zduńska Wola *Landsmanshaft* in Israel. In 2023, he organised a visit of the Zduńska Wola organisation to the town of their ancestors. The group included just over 20 people from Israel. They met with the mayor, visited the town museum, and took a tour of the city with a local guide. The group also went to the cemetery where a prayer was said at a mass grave. The group did not visit the registry office, nor did they schedule any meetings with the local residents. The group then went independently to the town park, where they took a group photo. One of the participants noted on his personal Facebook profile upon his return: יחד איתנו כאן נמצאת קבוצה לא גדולה של ישראלים שעד אתמול לא הכירו זה את זה. המשותף לכולנו הוא המקום הקטן והשכוח הזה, **מקום מקולל** שעבורנו הוא גם שורש (Together with us here is a small group of Israelis who until yesterday did not know each other. What we all have in common is this small and forgotten place, Zduńska Wola, **a cursed place** that for us is also a root) (bold by the author).
- 21 Individual Zduńska Wola *landsmanshaftn* still works in this way. For example, a group of the oldest former residents of Zduńska Wola forming the *landsmanshaft* in New York City does not work actively among former residents of Zduńska Wola centred on the Internet around Daniel Wagner. In turn, those who are concentrated around him live around the world, including the United States.
- 22 A website dedicated to the Jewish cemetery in Ożarów states that Norman Weinberg started researching his family history in 1996 after visiting the website REIPP SIG (now JRI-Poland). What he found on the website encouraged him to intensify his family research in Poland. He also decided to restore the Jewish cemetery. A few years later, he contacted Andrzej Omasta and together they planned cemetery restoration projects. *Vide.*: <http://www.ozarow.org/index.htm> (accessed on 25 January 2024).
- 23 The first of these projects was *Strategies For The Integration of Genealogical Datasets* implemented for the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy in Jerusalem (together with Jakub Zajdel and the author of this text) and *Photographic and Topographic Census Project in the Jewish Cemetery of Zduńska Wola* (together with the author of this text and the Yachad historical society).
- 24 In Szczekociny, it is dealt with by a local organisation called ReBorn Roots. Although I do not discuss Szczekociny in detail, it is worth noting. For several years, former Jewish residents and descendants have organised a festival called Yahad, in cooperation with Agnieszka Piśkiewicz, a former English teacher, and Mirosław Skrzypczyk, a local teacher. All residents are invited to the festival. Its programme is divided into two parts. The first one, commemorating the Jews of Szczekociny, takes place in the Jewish cemetery. It is attended by *landsleit* from Israel, Germany, and the United States, residents of the town, the Chief Rabbi of Poland, and other invited guests. The second part of the festival takes place in the local school and its surroundings, where a stage is set. The *landsmanshaft* and ReBorn Roots organise a concert, Hasidic dance classes, a sampling of Jewish cooking, and the promotion of books telling the story of Jewish Szczekociny: the translation of Szczekociny Yizkor Book and a memoir by Izyk Bornstein. Each of these events attracts large numbers of people.
- 25 Questionnaire No. 58. (anonymous respondent).
- 26 Questionnaire No. 34. (anonymous respondent).
- 27 Questionnaire No. 64. (anonymous respondent).
- 28 Questionnaire No. 74.
- 29 The article does not address the topic of Jewish genealogists coming from Orthodox and Hasidic circles. It should be noted, however, that they exist as well. One person who stands out is Naftali Halberstam, the founder and leader of the Yochsin Institute of Jewish Genealogy in Borough Park, Brooklyn, New York. However, the genealogy that he practices has very different roots and different objectives and, therefore, brings about different results.
- 30 Questionnaire No. 74.
- 31 Many of the descendants of the former Jewish residents of Zduńska Wola have visited the town several times since the end of the nineties. In the last ten years, they have started to bring their children with them in order to interest them in their family history and the place where their ancestors came from.
- 32 Questionnaire No. 36.
- 33 Questionnaire No. 44.
- 34 Questionnaire No. 31. (anonymous respondent).
- 35 Questionnaire No. 18 (anonymous respondent).
- 36 Questionnaire No. 94.
- 37 Questionnaire No. 84.
- 38 Questionnaire No. 105.
- 39 Interview with Daniel Wagner during research works at the Jewish cemetery in Zduńska Wola in 2004.
- 40 Questionnaire No. 55.

- 41 Questionnaire No. 69.
- 42 Marianne Hirsch defines them as a generation of post-memory. They are people born after the war and, therefore, they know the Holocaust only from stories; they grew up in its shadow. Among my 107 respondents, 42 people represent the second generation (39.26%) and 16 people belong to the third generation (14.96%). Six people belong to the second and third generation at the same time, because one of their parents was born after the war, and the other one just before the war (5.6%). The fourth generation is represented by one person (0.9%). *Vide* (Hirsch 1997).

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