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Jewish Heritage Tourism in Krakow. Authenticity and Commodification Issues

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Abstract: Tourism destinations located within rich and complex cultural contexts tend to offer a wide range of different experiences to visitors, spanning from standardized to more alternative ones. The quest for authenticity is central in the construction of tourism image and business, but easily raises questions related to appropriation, commercialization and trivialization. This study focuses on Jewish heritage tourism, a niche segment gradually turning into a mass tourism experience, through a qualitative research made in Krakow, Poland. Jewish-themed tourism in the area has gone through intense growth in spite of its dwindling Jewish population. As a consequence, the representation and consumption of the related heritage mostly occurs independently from the Jewish community itself and shows clear signs of commercial exploitation. The study results show that, in spite of the issues related to simplified narratives and staged practices, commodification, with its partial and functional reconstruction of the past, does not interfere with the religious or secular activities of the Jewish community, which is more pragmatically focused on present-day life.

Keywords: authenticity; commodification; minority heritage; Jewish heritage; Krakow; Poland



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1. Introduction

Places with a complex history of multi-ethnic coexistence, cultural exchanges and identity hybridization are of special interest for heritage, landscape and tourism studies [1,2]. The possible combinations of inclusion or exclusion, dissonance or harmony, participation or segregation, can produce different outcomes, such as heritage destruction, oblivion, concealment, on the one hand, or recognition, appropriation, promotion, on the other [3]. Particularly in those cases where minority heritage is concerned, for example in contexts where historic ethnic minorities used to live, or still live, or where new ethnic communities have recently settled, or where numbers and hierarchical positions have changed, or even capsized, issues related to the narrative, perception, interpretation, representation and management of heritage are often observed [4–7].

When, for political, economic or demographic reasons, one group has the power and chance to decide which aspects of heritage should be highlighted and promoted, and how, including ethnic minority heritage, the problems of authenticity, commodification and participation arise, and may even lead to conflicts and identity clashes [8–11].

In fact, heritage may be deliberately created, reshaped, reinterpreted or even abused in order to legitimize a certain social system, political orientation or economic plan, and the images, narratives and messages connected with tourism promotion can often bring out these dynamics [3,12].

According to Smith [13], certain groups or individuals have the power to select, evaluate and interpret certain aspects or elements of heritage, and she calls this phenomenon Authorized Heritage Discourse: “heritage is a culturally directed process of intense emotional power that is both a personal and social act of making sense of, and understanding, the past and the present” [13], p. 304. Hence, heritage is more than a collection of material artefacts or intangible traditions; what counts is the meaning and representation placed upon them [14,15].

According to this vision, the issue of authenticity almost inevitably arises when an ethnic, social or political group selects, authorizes, controls, interprets and manages the heritage of another one, for different purposes, including tourism. For cultural tourists, especially those from Western cultures, the desire to partake in authentic cultural experiences is often the primary objective of their trip [16–18]. Major theoretical frameworks concerning the heritage tourism supply are related to authenticity [19–21].

In general, a repetitive, superficial and standardised cultural tourism product can be seen as a form of commodification, or staged authenticity [22,23]. According to this vision, tourist operators, and tourists themselves, are a major source of heritage commodification because they tend to focus on simplified, standardized and marketable experiences, even though they often claim and seek to witness the existence of authentic cultural identities [24,25]. This paradox causes major impacts on landscape and behaviours, and creates the need for staged representations of the diversity they wish to find [26]. The consequences can be complex, varying from a strong incentive for heritage preservation, restoration and promotion, to cases of outright dispossession and deliberate distortion by dominant stakeholders at the expense of local communities [27,28].

According to Urry [29], most tourists can be seen as “gazers” having a fast and superficial relation to the places they visit. However, the concept of authenticity can also be seen as subjective, according to the varying indicators that consumers can use to assess the actual levels of authenticity [17]. Therefore, even the standardized experiences commonly provided by visits to popular places of interest are still capable of satisfying the psychological need for a sense of achievement [30,31]. These pseudo experiences allow tourists to feel a sense of connection and immersion into the environment they visit, hence facilitating a sort of narrative absorption and an ultimate sense of authenticity [32].

The issue of cultural appropriation, defined by Bredin [33] as “the use and exploitation by a majority or dominant group of cultural knowledge or expressions originally produced by a minority or dominated group” is not necessarily and thoroughly negative, and can be matched with a more neutral or positive phenomenon of cultural appreciation. However, the complex relation between appropriation, authenticity, and commodification, is probably going to question the whole heritage tourism dimension in relation to its impact on local development dynamics as well as narratives and representations of “otherness” and “diversity” [22,34–36]. Is trivialization of “foreign” culture and heritage an inevitable consequence of fast tourism? The answer may vary according to different ideological points of view, and to a different weight assigned to material or spiritual benefits and drawbacks.

This paper presents a research work dealing with the issues of authenticity and commodification of minority heritage, with Jewish heritage tourism in the Polish city of Krakow as case study. The selected context is particularly significant since the representation of this extensive heritage for tourism purposes is not controlled by the tiny surviving Jewish community anymore, which produces potentially distorting dynamics. The author chose to focus on the perception of the current trends by the local Jewish community and other stakeholders connected to this heritage, in order to investigate and analyze their representations of these issues and their visions of the future. A methodological section will present the research approach and tools, followed by a focus on the distinctive trends and features of the recent development of the Jewish heritage tourism niche segment. The case study will be synthetically described through a geo-historical portrait. Then, the main results obtained through observations and interviews will be presented and discussed.

2. Methodology

The study is based on a qualitative research method through observations, interviews and consultation of secondary sources. The field study was made between September 2018 to June 2019 through repeated visits to the Jewish sights in Krakow, including synagogues, museums, memorials, community buildings, cultural venues, and Jewish-themed tourist agencies, shops and restaurants, and walks in the relevant areas characterized by the presence of Jewish-themed heritage tourism.

A total of 16 interviews with key stakeholders dealing with Jewish heritage in Krakow were held, including community leaders (JCC—Jewish Community Center), religious representatives (Gmina—Jewish Religious Community), museums staff, tourist guides, cultural events organizers, shopkeepers and restaurant owners. The interviews were held in their offices and workplaces, and were conducted in Polish and English, according to the interviewee's preference.

All these interviews were semi-structured, they began with a clear presentation of the research aims and included a fixed set of general questions (among which: "How has Kazimierz [the Jewish district] changed over the years?"; "Why do tourists visit Kazimierz?"; "How do you see the future of Jewish-themed tourism in the area?"), which were a basis for broader and more informal conversations. The interviews with Jewish stakeholders also included questions related to their identity and perception ("Do tourists experience authentic Jewish culture during their visit?"; "How do you relate to that representation?"; "Does it affect the life of the Jewish community?"). Specific concepts such as "commodification", "staged authenticity", "authorized heritage discourse" or "cultural appropriation" were not used during the interviews. Rather, the interviewees were free and encouraged to point out the main positive or negative points or trends using their own words, and the most significant sentences have been reported in the text as quotations. The interviews with the Jewish stakeholders mainly dealt with the relations between the Jewish community and the Jewish-themed tourism development in the city, while the interviews with the other stakeholders focused on the features of this specific tourism segment and its future perspectives.

The author also consulted a range of secondary sources, such as statistical data on the demography and the economy of the area and materials that directly or indirectly deal with minority heritage management, representation and usage in Krakow and Poland. These include the municipal and the national institutional websites [37,38].

The combination of these different sources allowed understanding which aspects of Jewish history, identity and heritage have been selected and promoted, and how they have been turned into tourism products, or not, which permitted the discussion on the present dimension of commodification.

3. Trends in Jewish Heritage Tourism

Jewish heritage tourism is a relatively recent segment in cultural tourism which has experienced significant growth in many European destinations [39–41]. In most cases, due to the decline or disappearance of the European Jewish population in the 20th century, Jewish tangible and intangible heritage, particularly in its tourism-relevant cultural aspects, is now mainly managed by non-Jews [42]. Hence, non-Jews are now leading a complex and varied phenomenon of rediscovery of Jewish history and culture, applying lenses and filters which produce changing narratives, representations and practices. Outright commodification is one of the most controversial aspects of this dynamics, but the reasons for this growing interest in this historic minority heritage are more complex. In fact, it is also linked with wider dimensions including territorial identity redefinition processes, new political and geopolitical orientations, and debates about diversity, tolerance and multiculturalism, etc. [6,43–46].

In particular, Central and Eastern Europe, since the end of communism, has experienced a widespread resurgence of interest in Jewish religion, history and culture, after decades of oblivion or concealment, within a more general rediscovery and revival of pre-war memories and narratives [47]. The growing interest in the Holocaust and its sites, since the late early 1990s, is part of this phenomenon. Many new museums, festivals and commercial venues focus on Jewish themes. This means that this heritage is visible again in the urban landscapes. In many cities and regions, Jewish religious or secular culture is now increasingly perceived as part of local and national heritage, history and identity, even where Jewish communities no longer live, or have greatly declined in numbers and influence [48–51].

The celebration of the multicultural past of cities like Prague, Budapest, Lviv, Lublin or Riga intermingles with a new post-communist narrative whose aim is to demonstrate the belonging to a “Western” or “Mitteleuropean” world, an idealized dimension of cosmopolitanism and cultural flourishing, tolerance and freedom [47,52,53], in spite of persistent or resurgent episodes of antisemitism [54,55].

Commodification of Jewish sites, and Holocaust sites as well, has been critically analyzed by several authors [49,56,57], although other authors have stressed the positive effects of these phenomena of tangible and intangible heritage rediscovery and rehabilitation, including the revitalization and restoration of formerly neglected and decaying neighborhoods and monuments [6,58,59].

However, managing or even exploiting this legacy without the involvement and participation of the Jewish communities is problematic. Issues related to authenticity, narratives and representations inevitably arise when non-Jews reinterpret and manage Jewish heritage and offer it as a product to non-Jewish visitors and customers [51,60,61].

In many cases, the remaining Jewish communities aim to control the management and the interpretation of their heritage, but lack funds, influence and know-how; in other cases, the opinion of Jewish communities towards tourism is more mixed, indifferent or even critical, and they prefer to focus on religious or secular community life. Due to the historic political and identity fragmentation of the Jewish world, including the diaspora, a unanimous position on the dynamics and perspectives of Jewish heritage tourism is not always possible. At the same time, in many cases, non-Jewish public or private entities and stakeholders autonomously decide how to deal, manage and develop this cultural tourism segment without necessarily involve and negotiate with the Jewish communities, even more so where these communities no longer live [42,62].

Varied and sometimes divergent approaches coexist in this complex and delicate dimension of inter-ethnic encounter within tourism phenomena, as will be showed and explained through the case of Jewish heritage tourism in Krakow.

4. The Study Area

The Polish city of Krakow was first cited in 965 and developed as a trading, political and cultural center during the Middle Ages, attracting waves of settlers from different ethnic backgrounds, mainly Poles, Germans and Jews. The borough of Kazimierz, founded in 1335 by King Casimir the Great, became the main center for Jewish settlement. In spite of relatively frequent anti-Jewish riots and discriminations, the community kept growing and Kazimierz developed into a semi-autonomous Jewish town with its synagogues, bathhouses, schools and marketplaces. Jewish trade and crafts in the rest of Krakow were alternatively permitted and prohibited, so Kazimierz remained the center of Jewish life in the long term [63–65].

During the 19th century, restrictions and discriminations were gradually lifted, although episodes of antisemitism kept happening. In 1867, with the full emancipation, Jews obtained freedom of movement and the community started dividing into religious and secular branches. The Polish, German and Hebrew languages spread within the community, alongside Yiddish, and Zionist, assimilationist, socialist, conservative, liberal orientations emerged. The Jewish community continued to grow and reached 56,800 persons in 1931, 25% of the city’s total population. Right after the Nazi-German invasion of 1939, Jews suffered persecutions and violence. In 1941, the whole Jewish population was forced to move to a ghetto established in the industrial suburb of Podgórze, from which they were either deported to the Bełżec death camp or relocated to the notorious Płaszow labor camp, near Krakow. In spite of the efforts by the German entrepreneur Oskar Schindler, and other Polish rescuers, the vast majority of the Jewish population of Krakow was exterminated.

Several thousand Jews either survived or returned to Krakow after the war, but, under the threat of antisemitic attitudes, and due to the suppression of religious, political and economic freedom upon the establishment of the communist rule, most of them eventually left the city and the country. Today, approximately 1000 Jews live in Krakow, but only

about 200 identify themselves as members of the Jewish community. After the end of communism, in 1989, the community has regained the property of many buildings and has been reviving its religious and secular activities [54,62,66].

According to the information collected during the fieldwork, the core of the present-day community includes orthodox, reformed and secular sub-groups, with the Jewish Community Center, and the official Jewish Religious Community institutions, organizing and promoting an array of activities spanning from social to educational, religious, cultural, recreational, and welfare fields, some for Jews and some for a more general public [67,68]. A varying number of people, with Jewish backgrounds, are deeply assimilated and integrated into the wider Polish society and do not keep strong ties with these institutions and activities. In general, the traditional concentration of Jews in the old district of Kazimierz has long since vanished and they currently live scattered in the whole city. The main sources of income of the community are public pensions, due to the advanced age of many members, and tertiary activities.

The Kazimierz district, emptied of its pre-war Jewish population, still counts 7 synagogues, built in different styles over the centuries, 2 cemeteries and several community buildings, together with its typical architecture.

When, in 1993, Steven Spielberg directed the film *Schindler's List*, the history of the Jewish presence in Krakow became known worldwide. Together with the Auschwitz death camp, located 50 km West of Krakow, the city started to attract large numbers of visitors who, besides visiting the cultural heritage of the old town, were also interested in visiting Holocaust sites and getting to know more of Jewish history and culture [63,69,70].

As a direct consequence, starting from the mid-1990s, the impoverished, neglected and decaying district of Kazimierz rapidly became a major tourist attraction. Museums of Jewish history, Jewish-styled restaurants and shops with Jewish memorabilia were opened, together with numbers of other restaurants, hotels and shops for the more general local and international public, which made Kazimierz one of the most trendy and lively parts of the city [50]. Other significant changes, albeit at a lower scale, also happened in the former ghetto of Podgórze, where memorials were built and museums were opened, including the former Schindler's factory, and fragments of the ghetto walls are still visible [60,63].

The former Płaszów labor camp, instead, has few visible remains and hosts less-known memorials erected by different groups over the past decades.

Figure 1 shows the location of these main districts and sites.

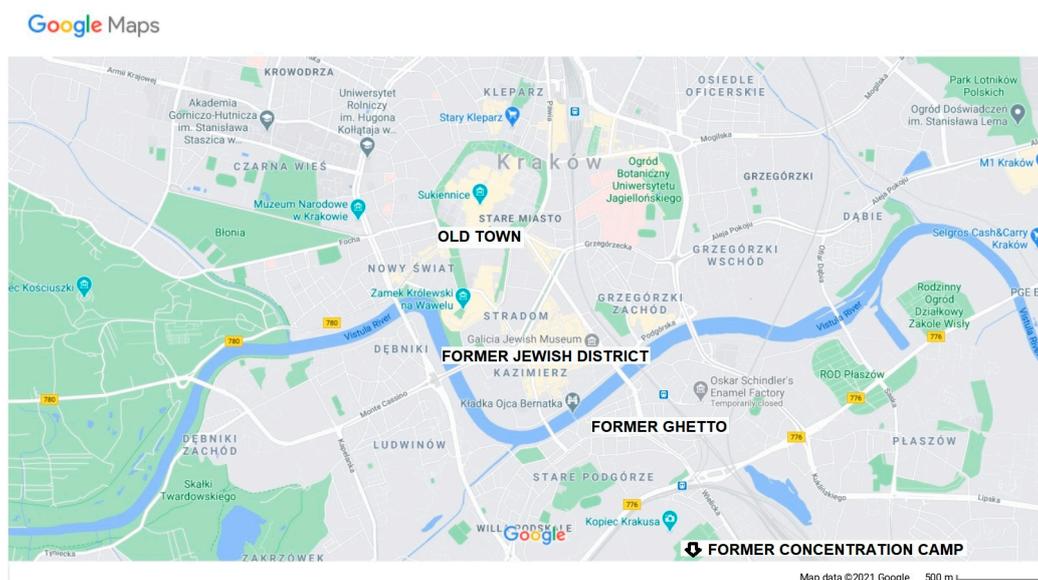


Figure 1. Main Jewish-related sites in Krakow. Source: Google Maps, modified by the author.

5. The Observations

The first stage of the fieldwork consisted in the systematic observation of all the aspects of the Jewish-themed tourist and cultural offer in the area of Kazimierz, including the public and private-owned museums, the synagogues, cemeteries, memorials, murals, signals, restaurants, art galleries, shops, stands, concerts, guided tours advertisements, and festivals. The aim was not to merely list these elements, rather to analyze the image and representation of Jewish history and culture in Krakow through the related visual and sound landscape.

The vast amount of information and impressions collected led to an inevitable categorization, whose most characteristic points will be presented and discussed below.

5.1. *The Main Cultural Elements*

The main Jewish-related cultural tourism offers in the district include the museums of Jewish history (Old synagogue), and the museum of history of Galician Jews. No real coordination exists between these institutions and the Jewish-related museums in Podgórze (Ghetto Pharmacy and Schindler's Factory), although their exhibits are basically complementary. The Old Synagogue focuses on pre-war traditional Jewish life, with a prevalence of religious dimensions; the Ghetto Pharmacy and Schindler's Factory focus on World War II and the Holocaust; The Galician Jews' Museum mainly focuses on the traces of Jewish heritage left in the landscape of South-Eastern Poland through photographs. None of these museums is managed by the Jewish community.

Besides the museums, the six other synagogues and the two cemeteries directly and indirectly show several aspects of Jewish culture, mainly through the religious dimension. All of them belong to the Jewish community, although only three of them are used for religious services, while two of them host privately managed, mainly Jewish-themed bookshops and temporary art exhibits, but are run by non-Jews.

Memorials and murals are scattered in the two districts of Kazimierz and Podgórze and show various elements of Jewish culture, such as religious symbols and writings in Hebrew and Yiddish, and information on the events of the Holocaust. They were mainly realized by non-Jewish artists upon autonomous initiatives.

Cultural festivals are organized every year in Kazimierz and beyond, focusing on Jewish music, literature, cinema and social, cultural and political topics. Jews do not take part in the organization of the main, official festival, but some of them individually contribute to smaller fringe festivals.

5.2. *The Commercial Elements*

The Eastern part of Kazimierz, where the synagogues and museums are located, hosts a number of restaurants and cafés which noticeably and evidently display and advertise their Jewish nature, through religious symbols, writings in Hebrew and Yiddish, themed menus, live or recorded Jewish traditional music. Most of them deliberately recreate a nostalgic pre-war atmosphere that recalls the 1920s and 1930s, with their old-fashioned furniture, lights and styles, although a growing share of them chose a more exotic Middle-Eastern Jewish theme, which recalls the Israeli world, in ambiance, music and food. Some of the venues organize themed events, such as "Shabbat-style" dinners, and are involved in the organization of themed festivals and meetings. Some other venues, located in former Jewish religious or community buildings, are basically modern-style restaurants which show Jewish elements as a distinctive feature. None of these restaurants and cafés is owned or run by Jews, none of them prepares proper (Kosher) Jewish food, and none of the music bands were actually formed by Jews.

The commercial dimension of Jewish heritage tourism also includes shops and stalls, which sell Jewish-themed souvenirs. None of these commercial activities are run by Jews, and the souvenirs, which sometimes strikingly intermingle with reproductions of Soviet and Nazi memorabilia, are not produced by Krakow Jews.

Guided tours constantly cover the streets and squares of Kazimierz, and some of the most popular tours use electric cars which transport tourists back and forth along combined itineraries which touch both Kazimierz and the old town, with some of them more decidedly focusing on Jewish sights and thus including the former ghetto of Podgórze and the Schindler's Factory, too. A number of agencies advertise standard tours which usually focus on three main destinations: the old town and Kazimierz, the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camps, and the famous historic salt mine of Wieliczka. None of the agencies and tour guides are Jewish.

6. The Local Voices

Once these elements were observed and collected, the author proceeded with the interviews to the Jewish and non-Jewish stakeholders working on heritage conservation and promotion.

6.1. The Jewish Community

In general, the community, through its secular and religious organizations, is not directly involved in the cultural or commercial dimensions of Jewish heritage tourism.

According to the interviews, the religious bodies, divided in orthodox and reformed orientations, share a moderately positive attitude toward tourism, but do not play any role in promotion or participation. Visitors are allowed to enter the synagogues and cemeteries during fixed opening times, and are provided with short explanations upon request. Instead, tourists are not allowed to visit the synagogues during rites and services, including Shabbat, as the proper religious sphere is not supposed to become a tourist attraction per se, as prayers may be disturbed by the presence of casual visitors.

“If tourists want to know about Judaism, they are welcome. They can visit the museums and the synagogues at certain times. However, services and prayers are not a show. They are meant for the faithful Jews” (Synagogue management staff).

The secular bodies, primarily the Jewish Community Center (JCC), showed a moderately more direct and active involvement in the tourism phenomenon going on in the district. The JCC explicitly welcomes tourists through multilingual panels at the entrance, and its staff is ready to show visitors the cultural and social life of the community through brochures, posters and explanations. However, the number of visitors is not comparable with those who crowd into the nearby staged venues. The main aim of the JCC is to show the diversity and activism of the present-day community in Krakow, rather than nostalgic pre-war themes, Holocaust memories or Israeli issues.

The staff showed high awareness of the trends in Jewish heritage tourism going on in the district, run by non-Jews and inevitably distorted by external representations of Jewish culture and identity. In order to limit these distortions, the JCC organizes periodic classes for tour guides operating in the area, with a focus on Jewish culture through Jewish eyes, but, as their attendance is purely voluntary, they are aware that many guides do not wish to attend these courses and the JCC has no control or monitoring parameters about the outcomes.

During the interviews, the standardized and forged representations of Jewish culture, through restaurants, music and souvenirs, were stigmatised as merely commercial initiatives. However, lenience prevails over resentment. The interviewees generally reckon that tourists seek that kind of experience, and they like to believe that what they see, eat and listen is “authentically Jewish”. Even when restaurants stage “Shabbat dinners”, and even serve pork meat, and still pretend to be typically Jewish, or deliberately and superficially display religious symbols and Hebrew writings to attract tourists, this is not viewed or felt as a great concern by the community staff:

“Klezmer music and old recipes from the 1930s, or Israeli music and middle-eastern food, do not represent us. We are Krakow Jews living normal lives in the

present day, and we would like to present ourselves this way" (Jewish community representative 1).

"We are not upset when we see tourists looking after those staged experiences. It is not our mission to change the nature of tourism" (Jewish community representative 2).

Overall, through the interviews, the priority for the Jewish community of Krakow appeared to be community life, not tourism. As a consequence, the experience of tourists in the area, and the representation of Jewish history and culture, in terms of authenticity, is not a major concern for them. Besides that, the community does not have the financial or human resources to run any significant tourism-oriented business.

6.2. Other Related Voices

Among the other voices, tour guides, museum staff and festival organizers, all of them non-Jews, showed significant levels of awareness and concern about the directions of Jewish heritage tourism in Kazimierz, in terms of authenticity and commodification issues, as well as other critical dimensions related to gentrification and civil society involvement and participation.

The interviewed tour guides reckon that tourists visiting Kazimierz often combine it with Auschwitz-Birkenau, and tend to see these experiences of life, death and rebirth as a sort of symbolic itinerary on simplified narratives, within a broader travel experience which also includes rather standardized visits to the old town of Krakow, seen as a showcase of Polish history and identity.

"They often visit Auschwitz in the day, and dine at the Jewish-themed restaurants in the evening, a sort of package of Jewish-related experiences within their vacation. [...] They may know that this experience of Jewish life is not authentic, but they do not seem to care too much" (Local guide 1).

"We don't expect tourists to follow complex lectures of history, or get involved in debates about identity and religion. They expect an experience which they can tell and recall, an easy and simplified narrative within a leisure-oriented journey. [...] At least, now every tourist knows that Krakow had a Jewish past" (Local guide 2).

The two local museums feel their mission is a rigorous representation of Jewish history and heritage in order to at least curb the commercial excesses that surround them. While the history museum located in the Old Synagogue displays a traditional portrayal of religion and traditions, the Galician Jewish museum focuses on a thought-provoking exhibit of photographs and panels, and hosts a bookshop, a café and various events. Hence, they offer two complementary experiences, which can be further combined with the Holocaust-themes museums of Podgórze. Regarding tourism, the museums staff holds a pragmatic approach and also stresses some positive dimensions of tourism development in the area:

"During the communist age, Kazimierz was a poor, neglected and even dangerous district. Now it is the most lively part of the city, it drags tourists and locals alike. We are part of this vibe" (Museum management staff).

The festival organizers showed partially diverging approaches: the main festival (Jewish Culture Festival) is gradually switching from a traditional performance of music and arts to the contemporary dimensions of Jewish life, which include Israeli and American influences, while the fringe festival (FestivALT) is experimenting art expressions about a more specific Polish-Jewish identity [71,72]. To use their own words, published on their website: "Cut off from its pre-war heritage, contemporary Jewish culture in Poland faces a crisis: either replicate American or Israeli Jewishness or attempt to resurrect the yiddishkeit [the old pre-war customs] of the past. FestivALT offers an alternative pathway [...] and focuses on the here and now". In all cases, both festivals organizers show criticism on the

commodified and standardized representations of Jewish culture in the district, but they do not engage in open confrontations.

“Tourism is about business, the entrepreneurs offer tourists what they are looking for. [...] We offer tourists and locals an alternative and deeper experience” (Jewish Culture Festival organizing staff).

Overall, the interviewed stakeholders pictured a complex cultural scene in which tourism plays a major role orienting the representation of Jewish history and heritage toward simplified narratives and standardized staged authenticity experiences. At the same time, the increasing visibility of Jewish heritage tends to work as a catalyst for more transversal cultural activities and social practices involving the locals as well as niche international tourists seeking alternative narratives and experiences.

7. Discussion

Besides the observations and the interviews, the Jewish-themed commercial and cultural offer displayed and promoted through brochures and websites confirmed the coexistence of different and diverging approaches, but also a relatively low level of conflict, as if these alternative paths, a more staged, simplified, and standardized one, and a more alternative, meditative, and immersive one, were clearly available and recognizable for local as well as international consumers. Figure 2 shows some examples: continuous Jewish-style music performed in Jewish-style restaurants, none of which played or run by Jews; fast excursions to Auschwitz and other Jewish-related sites; self-representation by the Jewish Community Center focusing on present-day social and cultural activities.



Figure 2. Different representations and aspects of Jewish heritage in Krakow. Source: author.

An easy, fast and entertaining experience is provided by electric carts running from the old town to Kazimierz and back, offering tourists the visit to a synagogue and a Jewish-style meal accompanied by overly traditional music, with a chance to buy themed souvenirs. Either before or after a visit to Auschwitz, this experience tends to show both a past and lost heritage, and proposes a feeling of revenge and resilience against the destruction pursued by the Nazis.

Alternatively, a more complete and deep experience encompasses an interaction with the contemporary dimension of Jewish identity. For example, a visit to the Jewish Cultural Center headquarters, the attendance of less standardized art performances, the inclusion of further sites, the discussion on ethical dimensions, are also easily available in the area.

The issues of heritage commodification, trivialization and authenticity are probably inevitable when a certain place and memory become a public domain, beyond geographic or ethnic barriers. Still, the fact that many visitors tend to seek an overly simplified narrative and representation, and do not show a real interest in distinguishing between

stage and reality, oversimplification and complexity, past and present, is to be taken into account when analysing this phenomenon.

Is the lack of authenticity an issue? Many tourism customers will not learn what kosher food is, or what music young Polish Jews listen to. Yet, they will learn many things about Jewish culture and European history which they would not have learned otherwise. The memory of Krakow Jews is kept alive through these different experiences and landscape units, although they are filtered and deformed by non-Jewish mediators. Limited knowledge through simplified experiences, and various forms of cultural appropriation in terms of music, symbols, ambiance, or narratives, is probably better than oblivion or indifference, and the Jewish community of Krakow seems aware of this, as well as most of the other stakeholders interested in Jewish heritage conservation and promotion. After all, as Jewish history and identity are increasingly perceived as a part of a broader Polish or European history and identity, it is inevitable that non-Jews will add their own visions, preferences, habits, and aims in heritage fruition.

With these pros and cons, can Krakow be considered a model in the overcome of the authenticity issues? Actually, it does not appear to be an easily replicable model. The high visibility of Jewish heritage, linked to the events and narratives of XX century history, the recent yet radical renewal of the formerly decaying Jewish area, with connected intense gentrification processes, and the marginal presence and role of the present Jewish community, produce a peculiar case of reconstruction, reinvention and rejuvenation of the past for contemporary uses.

In fact, the former Jewish district of Kazimierz experienced a significant rehabilitation and revival both in Jewish life and tourism, which means that, excluding the issues related to the excesses of commercialization, the current interest for the area benefits most stakeholders. Its striking transformation, from a neglected to a lively district, implies that the different voices have a high level of awareness of the consequences of tourism, leisure and culture sectors growth, and may improve their tools and strategies in order to enter the fray or shy away from it.

8. Conclusions

According to the results discussed above, the issue of cultural appropriation is declined, at the local level, in an array of practices produced by non-Jewish stakeholders building a partial representation of some aspects of Jewish culture and heritage for non Jewish customers. This is certainly linked to a high degree of commodification and a lack of “authenticity” in the experience of these customers. However, according to the Jewish community, this is not an overly negative trend or result, because the aspects of Jewish heritage that are functionally revived for tourism and commercial purposes do not produce particular conflicts with the community life and identity. Tourists and tourist operators largely ignore or overlook the current reality of Jewish social, cultural and religious life in Krakow and focus on a simplified, nostalgic and dramatic approach to history and diversity. While some Jewish communal institutions would prefer to present themselves in a more contemporary and complex way, the community, at the same time, does not necessarily wish to live in the spotlight.

In a way, some impacts of tourism concentration in this part of the city might be seen as more problematic or controversial for other groups and sensitivities, such as local neighbourhood residents, in terms of gentrification, crowding, social inequalities, while the Jewish community, mainly living out of the district, might benefit from general increased consideration, visibility, cultural exchanges and work opportunities.

This means that the positive and negative sides of commodification and commercialization transcend the affected communities and produce a transversal kaleidoscope of experiences, concerns, and wishes.

Apart from the uniqueness of the local case, a more general consideration can be made in regard to the reactions to heritage authenticity and commodification issues. According to Tosun [28], the participation of local communities in tourism management and benefits is

often critically hampered by structural economic, political and cultural limits. However, as this study shows, even though a shrinking, weakening, divided or reluctant community may not play a major role in tourism business, and let other stakeholders and customers reproduce, reinterpret and consume some aspects of their heritage, this will not necessarily produce feelings of exploitation or dispossession. Rather, the same community may focus on their intimate and dynamic relation with their identity and heritage, and leave staged experiences to others.

As MacCannell [26] had already observed, tourism is more about the individual and collective perception and representation of heritage, rather than its objective and intrinsic value. Hence, commodification may be seen as a response and consequence of a sum of similar demands, while the lack of authenticity in the experience of tourists is not a major issue as long as alternative paths are available.

Still, repeated and standardized offers and practices risk alienating local communities and visitors alike, mortifying and denying the value of complexity, diversity and pluralism, which remain the basis for the development of living cultures and evolving identities.

A future development of this research could complete the picture focusing on visiting tourists and local heritage consumers as well, in order to include and compare their expectations, motivations, choices, behaviours and impressions related to different aspects and experiences of tangible and intangible Jewish culture. These further steps, besides helping to evaluate the links between tourism on heritage representation in the local context and in comparable situations, could also contribute to reshape the post COVID-19 recovery in terms of continuity and discontinuity.

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