

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

Toby Axelrod

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

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Editor's introduction

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

With this in mind, we are publishing this report as the third in a series examining how Jewish communal life has evolved and developed in East-Central Europe since the collapse of Communism. This particular report focuses on Germany; two previous reports – focusing on Poland and Hungary – have already been published, and a fourth, looking at Ukraine, will be published shortly.

The project has its origins in two organizations: the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) and the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe (RF(H)E). JPR, a London-based research institute, consultancy and think-tank that specializes in contemporary Jewish affairs, has stood at the forefront of Jewish community research in the UK for several decades. Its work focuses primarily on Jews in Britain, but the Institute has a longstanding interest in Jewish life throughout Europe, and its publications include *Jewish Restitution and Compensation Claims in Eastern Europe and the Former USSR* (1993), *A new Jewish identity for post-1989 Europe* (1996), *Mapping Jewish culture in Europe today: a pilot project* (2002), *Jews and Jewry in contemporary Hungary: results of a sociological survey* (2004), and *Voices for the Res Publica: The common good in Europe* (2006-09). Most recently, JPR won a major commission from the European Union to conduct a pan-European study of Jewish perceptions and experiences of antisemitism, and the findings from that survey will be published by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights in late 2013. JPR has also had a longstanding interest in Jewish culture in

Europe, and was a co-founder of the European Association for Jewish Culture, with which it retains close ties.

RF(H)E is committed to protecting European Jewish heritage, fostering scholarship and enhancing Jewish life in Europe. The purpose of their grant programmes are three-fold: to support and develop skilled, trained professionals to ensure that the Jewish heritage found in the archives, libraries and museums of Europe is protected, conserved and accessible to a wide range of people; to encourage and nurture the field of academic Jewish studies across Europe by funding individual scholars, university departments and academic and research conferences; and to enable community groups to explore their own Jewish heritage and disseminate their own research to a wider audience. Lord Rothschild serves as President, Sir Victor Blank is the Chair of Trustees and Sally Berkovic is the CEO.

Both organizations – JPR and RF(H)E – had reached the conclusion independently of one another that the time was ripe for a review of East-Central European Jewish life, and over the course of several discussions, elected to partner on this project. Our shared purpose is to paint a series of portraits of Jewish life in different countries within the region in order to allow both community insiders and outsiders to reflect on each community's achievements, challenges and priorities. JPR developed the initial project proposal which, in turn, was shaped and finessed by RF(H)E. Throughout the process, JPR has taken full responsibility for research matters, and RF(H)E has provided funding and been a consistent source of advice and support.

We would also like to thank the Trustees of the Humanitarian Trust for their support of this project.

I am particularly grateful to my colleagues at JPR, Lena Stanley-Clamp, Judith Russell and Richard Goldstein, for their help with the project: Lena served with distinction as project manager in the early stages of the initiative, and both Judith and Richard have been centrally involved in managing it subsequently, as well as supporting the final stages of translation, editing and production.

Without their hard work, commitment and attention to detail, this report would not exist.

In recruiting researchers to undertake the work, we looked for individuals with excellent qualitative research credentials, experience in the field, and the capacity to understand and analyze the particular idiosyncracies of Jewish life in a sophisticated, independent and sensitive manner. In the particular case of Germany, we recruited Toby Axelrod, who is academic director of the Leo Baeck Summer University in Jewish Studies, under the auspices of the Center for Jewish Studies, Berlin-Brandenburg. An American journalist and translator, she has written books for teens on Holocaust history and is a co-founder of the Limmud Jewish learning project in Germany. Her PhD in progress (with the Center for Research on Antisemitism) focuses on Germans' personal confrontations with the Nazi past. In 2001, her biography of Hans and Sophie Scholl of the White Rose student resistance movement in Germany was named a 'notable book' by the Association of Jewish Libraries.

Toby Axelrod was supported in the research by Professor Y Michal Bodemann and Mareike Albers. Michal Bodemann, Professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto, has a PhD from Brandeis University which examined the rural social structure and politics in central Sardinia. His more recent research interests have focused on questions of German-Jewish relations, and his major publications include: *A Jewish Family in Germany Today. An Intimate Portrait* (2005); and *The New German Jewry and the European Context. The Return of the European Jewish Diaspora* (2008), which includes analysis of Russian Jewry and Jewish-Turkish relations in Germany.

Mareike Albers graduated from Humboldt University and holds a masters degree in Cultural Anthropology and History. After spending two semesters in New York City for the research on her M.A. thesis about young Jewish secular life in New York, she is now working on her dissertation on young Jewish adults and Jewish popular culture in Berlin, funded with a grant from the Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich Studienwerk.

The researchers involved in this Germany report, along with the researchers involved in the other

country reports in this series, were asked to address four key questions:

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

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

- Jewish religious life;
- Jewish education (formal and informal);
- Jewish cultural development;
- academic Jewish studies;
- preservation of Jewish heritage;
- young adult (18-35) engagement;
- leadership development;
- innovation and social entrepreneurship;
- funding and philanthropy;
- welfare (children and the elderly);
- combating antisemitism;
- Israel education, advocacy and *aliyah* (emigration to Israel).

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

The research for the Germany report was conducted between 2011 and 2012. Qualitative methods were used: fourteen one-to-one interviews and one focus group discussion

were carried out, lasting for between one and three hours. In order to be eligible, interviewees needed to hold a significant role in Jewish institutional and community life, have knowledge of several of the central issues listed above, and be, in the view of the researchers, highly likely to remain decision-makers in Jewish communal life for the foreseeable future. In the analysis, we have sought to represent the fundamental viewpoints and differences of opinion we heard, as well as the suggestions for alternative ways forward which were proposed by the interviewees. The inclusion of the numerous quotations that punctuate the report should not be misinterpreted as our endorsement of any particular views, but rather simply as illustrations of perspectives we believed worthy of inclusion in a report like this. Furthermore, they do not necessarily represent all of the views that exist; a limited number of interviews was conducted for this study, so the report highlights only those issues that were raised by the interviewees. In this respect, the report should be seen as a gateway into understanding some of the key issues with the German Jewish community today; an initial guide, rather than a fully comprehensive assessment. Whilst it might have added insight to attribute each quotation to a particular source, we deliberately kept all of

them anonymous in order to allow respondents greater freedom to speak openly and with candour. We hope and believe that the result of our work is a rich and insightful portrait of German Jewish life that captures multiple perspectives, but nevertheless points to a clear set of recommendations concerning how the contemporary community might best respond to the wide range of challenges it faces.

Together with the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe, we hope that this report, alongside the others in the series, will provide a guide to all those wishing to understand, develop or invest in the future of European Jewish life. It is aimed at community development professionals, national and international donors and foundations, community leaders, researchers, academics, and ultimately, the communities themselves. We plan to disseminate the reports widely in order to raise awareness of the issues that exist, and our hope and intention is that all of the reports in the series will serve to help all supportive and interested parties to discover new insights, develop new policy ideas, and ultimately make new and effective investments in each community.

Dr Jonathan Boyd
Executive Director, JPR

Author's introduction

In his unsung autobiography, *Soaring Underground*, the late Larry (Lothar) Orbach describes how, as a ten-year-old in 1934, he won a school prize for tracing his German ancestors further back than any other pupil in his Berlin school: “to the 1490s, when a Moses Auerback ... was a court Jew to the Bishop of Regensburg.”¹

The heartbreaking conclusion to this episode, which opens the dramatic chronicle of Orbach's descent into hiding in the capital of Nazi Germany, is that the school rector summons the boy to his office. A portrait of Hitler on the wall behind him, the rector announces that, because Lothar is Jewish, he is ineligible for the prize. Instead, “the second place winner, a surly sixth grader whose German ancestors are all Aryan, will have the honour”² of reciting a poem at the commencement gathering. Lothar holds back his tears until reaching home.

The story is a poignant and painful reminder of how the perpetrators of genocide also rob people of their past. It is a reminder of the pride that many German Jews felt in their national identity; and it also hints at the richness and depth of German Jewish history, which actually has been traced back to the fourth century CE.

In the introduction to his comprehensive history of German Jewry, “Die Juden in Deutschland, von der Römerzeit bis zur Weimarer Republik,” Nachum T Gidal notes that there is evidence of a “flourishing Jewish community in Cologne in the year 321” CE. At least by the sixth century CE, Jews were living under the Frankish kings and working as merchants, landowners, customs officers, doctors and minters of coins.³

Dramatic swings characterize German Jewish history: from the growth of Jewish communities and centres of learning in the tenth to thirteenth centuries to their decimation during the Crusade-related pogroms; from the regrowth of Jewish life

to the anti-Jewish massacres, expulsions and flight during the Black Plague in the fourteenth century; followed by the renewed flowering of Jewish life, the granting of additional civic rights in the Napoleonic era, the “Enlightenment period” and the birth of the Reform movement. All cut short by the Holocaust.

German Jewry is famous for its contributions to the worlds of Jewish learning, secular literature, art, music and science: Rashi, the medieval Jewish Torah scholar;⁴ Moses Mendelssohn, philosopher of *Haskalah*, or the Jewish Enlightenment; Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the intellectual founder of contemporary Orthodox Judaism; Rabbi Abraham Geiger, the founder of Reform Judaism; and Rabbi Zecharias Frankel, the intellectual progenitor of Conservative Judaism, were all German Jews, not to mention the brother and sister composers Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn, the poet Heinrich Heine and the physicist Albert Einstein, all of whom were Jewish or had Jewish roots. They are among the famous names one sees on the virtual tour through 1,600 years of Jewish history in Berlin's Jewish Museum. But there were also rural Jews: horse traders, farmers and craftspeople. There were ordinary merchants and businesspeople, like Glückel of Hameln, the Jewish businesswoman whose diary – excerpted at the museum – provides insight into daily life for Jews in Germany of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. And there was Regina Jonas of Berlin, the very first woman to be ordained as a rabbi in 1935. She was murdered in Auschwitz.

As Amos Elon writes in *The Pity of it All*: “... the Jews of Germany never ceased in their effort to merge German and Jewish identity. The heartstrings of their affection were tied early; their overriding desire was to be complete Germans. Many succeeded. If their success appears in retrospect an illusion, it was often a highly creative one and with a grandeur of its own.”⁵

1 Orbach, Larry and Orbach-Smith, Vivien, *Soaring Underground: A Young Fugitive's Life in Nazi Berlin*, Compass Press, Washington DC, 1996, p.5.

2 Ibid, p.7.

3 Nachum T Gidal, *Die Juden in Deutschland, von der Römerzeit bis zur Weimarer Republik*, Koeneemann Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, Cologne, 1996, p.10.

4 Whilst Rashi is most commonly associated with France, he spent many of his most formative years in Germany, in the famous medieval towns of Worms and Mainz.

5 Elon, Amos, *The Pity of it all: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743-1933*, Metropolitan Books, USA, 2002, p.8.

Today, we find ourselves in a new phase, with the Holocaust not far behind us, and with the Jewish population close to a third of the size it was when the Nazis came to power. Unlike young Lothar Orbach, few Jews here can trace their roots back within Germany. Rather, their modern origins lie in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. Whether they stay in Germany and flourish here – whether they continue to identify Jewishly, as secular, Orthodox, Reform, or other – are open questions.

One question – should Jews in Germany be sitting on packed suitcases – has been answered with a resounding “no” by prominent members of the community, who themselves survived the Nazi years in hiding. Yet with every antisemitic incident – be it from the far left or far right, from Islamic extremists or from the middle of society – the question is raised again: How

strong is this democracy, how safe are Jews in Germany, in Europe?

As Larry Orbach reflected in his memoir, “a lifetime later, I look back and wonder if in any way I could have sensed that my entire world, everything I trusted and believed in, was about to disintegrate ... No, I didn’t know then. I knew that something terribly wrong had happened, that this was not the way things were supposed to be in my Germany. But I had no idea of what was to come.”⁶

This rude awakening, this tension between wanting to trust and yet deeply mistrusting the very society one lives in, is characteristic of Jewish life in Germany over the ages, and utterly understandable. Today’s younger generations will not forget, but they are not dwelling on the past. Rather, they are shaping a Jewish future in a new Germany. With all its neuroses, its ambivalences and lurking threats, Germany is home.

1 Basic data on German Jews and German Jewish organizations

The Jewish population in Germany has undergone dramatic changes since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. From a country with a post-war Jewish population of about 25,000 – most of them Holocaust survivors from Eastern Europe and their descendants – Germany is now home to more than 240,000 people of Jewish background.⁷

Today, the main Jewish umbrella organization – Der Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland (the Central Council of Jews in Germany) – includes:

- Twenty-three separate Jewish associations in Germany's sixteen states;
- 108 Jewish communities;
- Approximately 105,000 affiliated members, most of them of Eastern European or Russian-speaking origin (the remaining 135,000 are not members; some are not halachically Jewish – i.e. are not recognized as Jews under Jewish law);
- A range of denominations from strictly orthodox to Masorti/Conservative, Progressive (non-patrilineal) and Renewal.

Berlin has the largest Jewish community, with about 11,500 members, plus perhaps twice as many unaffiliated Jews, including an estimated 10-15,000 Israelis. Other cities with large communities include Munich, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Cologne, Hanover, Stuttgart and Hamburg.

The former East German states (aside from Berlin) have also seen a major rise in their Jewish populations. Whereas in 1990 there were only seven Jewish communities with a total of 400 members in the former East German states, today there are seventeen communities with a total of 18,600 members.⁸

The Central Council of Jews in Germany (CCJG), founded in 1950, is the umbrella organization for Germany's 108 Jewish communities. These communities function under the umbrella of the *Einheitsgemeinde*, or “united community,” which oversees funding for communal needs. While the post-war community was officially orthodox or traditional, there has been increasing acceptance of the liberal streams of Judaism. In 2006, the Central Council accepted some congregations that were members of the Progressive Union under its umbrella for the first time, meaning that federal funding would also flow to them.

Halachic status is a major issue, with many ex-Soviet Jews identifying Jewishly to some degree even if they did not have a Jewish mother; many wanted greater acceptance than was afforded to them by the official bodies.

The Frankfurt-based Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle, or Jewish Central Welfare Organization, founded in 1917, is primarily concerned with helping the newer members of the community.

7 The website of the Zentralrat der Juden reports that, since 1989, 220,000 people came to Germany as so-called “quota refugees”. That is in addition to the approximately 20-30,000 who were living in Germany up to 1989. See: <http://www.zentralratjuden.de/de/topic/62.html>.

8 See: 2012 annual report of the Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle, or Jewish Central Welfare Organization (ZWST) and the website of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. For further information on Jews in East Germany, see www.zentralratjuden.de/de/topic/65.html.

2 Major achievements and milestones over the past twenty years

Looking back over the twenty-four years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, some of the most important achievements and milestones in the development of the German Jewish community have been:

- the immigration of more than 200,000 people of Jewish background to Germany;⁹
- the emergence of a new generation of post-war Jewish leaders;
- the move of the Central Council to Berlin.

The same global political changes that generated the vast immigration also sparked other developments that influenced Jewish life: the collapse of East Germany and the Soviet bloc; the unification of Germany in 1990 and subsequent move of Germany's capital from Bonn to Berlin in 1999; and the increasing distance in time from the Holocaust.

On its website today, the Central Council sums up the period as follows:¹⁰ "Among Soviet Jews, the political changes discernible in the Soviet Union gave rise not only to joy but also to fears of growing antisemitism. Many Jews sought shelter in Germany. In 1991, the Federal Government and governments of individual federal states adopted official immigration rules for Jews from the USSR admitting them to Germany as so-called quota refugees. Over the last two decades a total of 220,000 people came to Germany within the framework of 'Jewish immigration'. About 50 per cent of them are Jewish according to religious criteria, the rest being persons of Jewish descent and non-Jewish spouses."

Germany is often said to have a "special relationship" with its own Jewish population and with Israel, because of the Holocaust. This is expressed partly in such obligations as reparations to survivors, in political and financial support

for Israel, and in financial support for Jewish communities in Germany. But it is also expressed in Germany's culture of remembrance and in its educational programmes for the majority of Germans.

According to a Nazi census in 1933, there were some 522,000 Jews in Germany at that time, including those who had converted to other faiths. About 304,000 Jews fled Nazi Germany; many of them ended up deported from other countries and were subsequently murdered during the Holocaust.

When war broke out, there were some 214,000 Jews living within Germany's 1937 border. By the end of the war, between 160,000 and 180,000 Jews from Germany had been murdered in the Holocaust, according to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.¹¹ About 8,000 German Jews survived in Berlin, either in hiding or because they were married to non-Jews. In all, some 15,000 German Jews survived the Holocaust.

Following the war, about 200,000 Jews of eastern European background were housed in displaced persons camps in Germany. Most of these Jews left Germany by the early 1950s. Thus, according to the Central Council, there were only 15,000 members of Jewish communities in West Germany in 1950 (The Federal Republic of Germany),¹² while only a few hundred stayed in communist East Germany (German Democratic Republic).

The number of Jews in East and West Germany remained fairly stable until the end of the Cold War.

Collapse of the USSR and migration of Jews

In the years immediately before the collapse of the communist bloc, East German leader Erich

9 See: DellaPergola, S. (2010). *World Jewish Population, 2010*. Storrs, Connecticut: North American Jewish Data Bank. Available to download at: www.jewishdatabank.org/Reports/World_Jewish_Population_2010.pdf, p.48.

10 See: www.zentralratjuden.de/de/topic/1.html

11 See: www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005469

12 For further information about the Jewish community in former West Germany, see the website of the Central Council: <http://www.zentralratjuden.de/de/topic/66.html>

Honecker, General Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party from 1971-1989, saw potential political salvation in the treatment of Jews and the acknowledgement of Germany's role in the Holocaust. Up to then, the communist state generally suppressed the unique character of the Nazi genocide of European Jewry, and charged West Germany as the natural successor to the Nazi state. East Germany was seen as the successor to the German resistance.

In the final years of his regime, Honecker ramped up commemoration of the Holocaust; established ties with the World Jewish Congress; promised to pay reparations to Jewish Holocaust survivors for the first time (this did not happen); and promised to launch the renovation of the historic, war-damaged New Synagogue in East Berlin – reportedly in a bid to win an invitation to the White House. Reconstruction began in 1988.

In November 1989, the Berlin Wall came down, setting in motion the process that would culminate in the unification of East and West Germany. Honecker was ousted in 1989 and eventually moved to Chile, where he died in 1994.

Before unification, rumours of increasing antisemitism in the communist bloc were circulating. In early 1990, Jewish activists in former East Germany raised the issue to the East German Zentrale Runde Tisch (Central Round Table, set up to oversee the transition to democracy), which had been convened under the last premier of East Germany, Hans Modrow. Irene Runge, an East Berlin Jew, together with Israeli Rabbi Tsevi Weinman, delivered a proposal to open the doors of East Germany to Soviet Jews.¹³

But the Modrow government did nothing. Rather, it was Lothar de Maizière, the GDR's first and only democratically elected leader, who implemented the regulations for Jewish

immigration to former East Germany in the spring of 1990 and continued talks about compensation with the president of the World Jewish Congress, Edgar Bronfman.

According to Runge, West German leaders were not keen on an open door to Jewish immigration – after all, one could not call these Jews refugees, since they could also go to Israel. But as unification appeared inevitable, pressure on West Germany to open immigration to Soviet Jews increased.

Heinz Galinski, then president of the Central Council, insisted that the West German government could not leave Soviet Jews in the lurch: “It is unacceptable for German politicians to start a head-count of those who have suffered religious persecution. There is no doubt that antisemitism in the Soviet Union has taken on the character of a manhunt. It is a life and death question for many thousands of people.”¹⁴

It was then that the federal government proposed to classify Jewish refugees from the FSU as “Kontingentflüchtlinge,” or quota refugees. The joint ministries of the interior of the German states initiated the Quota Refugee Law in 1991.¹⁵

As Berndt writes, Wolfgang Schäuble – then Minister of the Interior and head of the negotiations on unification – agreed to this quota refugee plan, together with Galinski and his deputy chairman, Ignatz Bubis, also a Holocaust survivor. As Schäuble recounted to Juliane Berndt, “That meant that these immigrants were distributed evenly among the individual states. The

13 Runge, Irene, “Das große Wunder einer kleinen jüdischen Einwanderung,” in HaGalil, 2007. <http://www.hagalil.com/01/de/Juden.php?itemid=787>

14 Berndt, Juliane: “Ich weiß, ich bin kein Bequemer... Heinz Galinski - Mahner, Streiter, Stimme der Überlebenden”; be.bra verlag, Berlin, November 2012, p. 242.

15 Accordingly, “entry visas for Jews from the Soviet Union would be granted on a case-by-case basis analogous to the application of the German Quota Law, but without any limitation on numbers or time limits, although subject to the capacity of each federal state to accept new arrivals.” <http://www.zentralratjuden.de/en/topic/155.html>

basis for this was a 1991 decision of the Conference of Interior Ministers [on 9 January 1991].”¹⁶

Much of the world watched nervously as the majority of Germans rejoiced over unification; not everyone – including Jews in Germany – welcomed what they saw as the return of a strong nation. In the early 1990s, a rash of spectacular xenophobic and antisemitic attacks in former East German states – including the firebombing of the synagogue in Lübeck in 1994 – prompted some Jews to leave the country.

But these incidents also prompted some American Jewish organizations – those previously reluctant to give a seal of approval to Jewish life in the country that generated the Holocaust – to undertake journeys of solidarity.

Up to this point, post-war West Germany, always keen to strengthen its ties with the West, had done much to confront its Nazi past, and even reached out to former German Jews, inviting them to visit the “new Germany.” Now, a united Germany took on this mantle, taking a public stand against antisemitism and other forms of hate, and encouraging Jewish leaders abroad (in Israel, the United States and United Kingdom, primarily) to see the new Jewish life here for themselves.

Such efforts were especially important politically as the unified country solidified its power in Berlin for the first time since the Second World War. Cynically put, the presence of Jews in the capital and elsewhere was worn by the German government as a sign to the world that they could trust Germany and do business and politics with her.

The shift of the capital had, according to one interviewee, “an impact on what Germany thinks of itself and automatically towards its position with Jews.”

In fact, Galinski said in early 1990, a few months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, that he believed the Central Council, too, should move back to Berlin from its post-war headquarters in Frankfurt.¹⁷

Until Germany passed its new immigration law fifteen years later, the country boasted one of the fastest growing Jewish communities in the world per capita.

The 2005 law introduced a point system for would-be immigrants, which had the effect of reducing pressure on existing Jewish communities to integrate newcomers. Israel had also urged Germany to tighten immigration laws, after it became clear in 2004 that more former Soviet Jews were coming to Germany than to the Jewish state.

One interviewee noted: Israel was not “pleased that the [Soviet Jews] were coming to Germany. It was a crucial point.”

Under the new system, which received the approval of the Central Council, any Jew applying for German citizenship had to have at least fifty of 105 possible points. Exceptions would be made for survivors of National Socialist persecution.

The most important criteria were education and job experience. Knowledge of the German language brought twenty-five points. There were advantages for candidates under the age of forty-five, with a college degree and job experience.

These regulations resulted in only 617 Jewish immigrants coming to Germany in the first three quarters of 2006, compared to an average of 15,000 who came each year from 1995 to 2005, according to the German Interior Ministry.

The new law essentially stopped Jewish immigration to Germany. But by that time, the Quota Refugee Law of 1991 had already had its effect: virtually all interviewees agreed that this was the biggest factor influencing Jewish life in Germany since 1990.

The challenges of integration

Integration has not been easy: the massive influx of a population with a different culture and different mother-tongue has put enormous strain on existing communities, sometimes sparking resentments between old-timers and newcomers. Members of the post-war established community – many of them survivors from Eastern Europe – suspected the new immigrants of lacking democratic values and

¹⁶ Op cit, Berndt, Juliane, p. 242

¹⁷ Ibid, p.237.

of taking advantage of Germany's generosity. New immigrants saw the established Jewish community as unwilling to share power with the new majority.

A participant in the focus group told of an acquaintance from the established community who had trouble dealing with the newcomers. "I said to her: 'But you yourself come from Eastern Europe.' And she answered, 'Yes, but I am a German Jew and even my name is German.' They see themselves as German, as opposed to the Russian-speakers."

But some say there are truths to the stereotypes. Another participant in the focus group, also a Jew from the Former Soviet Union, commented that she herself needed at least ten years to "think in a democratic manner. And some stayed the way they were, not wanting to integrate."

Many former Soviet Jews were well-educated, older professionals who were unable to find jobs in their newly adopted home. Those who joined Jewish communities often did not have enough income to pay the religious community tax that supported language instruction, vocational training, social clubs and religious programmes. In addition, the growth of communities around the country created a need for a new infrastructure of synagogues, schools and community centres.

"There was amazing growth in the first years, until 1996/97; and many communities were more or less overrun, overwhelmed, if you will," said one interviewee. "Take Dortmund for example. Its Jewish community grew from 300 members to 3,500. They couldn't react fast enough, they weren't prepared."

Another respondent agreed: the communities were "completely overburdened, and they even changed their function to become service providers," said the young respondent, who also remarked on the social impact for her. Before, she had little to do with Russian-speaking Jews. "And as interesting as it was, their mentality was something I wasn't familiar with. Only now do I realize, when I look back, that it has become completely normal for me ... that they are Russian-speaking; it is normal to know a thousand Dimas and Mashas!"

It took several years before new structures could be established and the new community members were ready to be integrated within them. For one respondent, a major sign of progress was the first ordination of rabbis trained in Germany ... whether Orthodox, Progressive (Liberal or Reform) or Chabad. "That's already something that one could not have dreamt of in 1990."

Until then, most of the rabbis working in post-war Germany had come from the United States, Israel or England, and did not even speak German, he noted.

As one respondent of German background put it, it was to be expected that such massive changes would have their downsides. The cultural outlooks of both groups were vastly different and led to conflicts.

But the friction also generated positive developments: when it comes to building Jewish life in post-war Germany, there is nothing to compare with the rapid growth in vitality, vibrancy, influence and programming that marks today's Jewish population in Germany.

One interviewee said: "The story of the Jewish community in Germany since the 1990s is definitely a story of growth and development. The key moments have been a growth in numbers and an expanding and newly established infrastructure."

With numbers has come a greater degree of normalcy. There is less pressure to explain yourself when people ask, "How can you live as a Jew in Germany?" said one respondent. "And the need to distance yourself from the non-Jewish environment has also diminished."

Jews are more comfortable as a minority within the German non-Jewish society – there is more interfaith dialogue, more discussion, and a greater readiness to openly address tensions that used to be kept private, she added.

Jews themselves are thus learning to deal with their own diversity, she added.

The immigrants "have enriched the communities not only in terms of numbers, but also in terms of the structure of Jewishness," another

interviewee noted. “They brought with them a social, societal and ethnic understanding of Jewish identity, which includes the element of Russian culture. ... And this diversity of approaches makes it harder to keep all groups under one roof.”

Ultimately, with all these changes, Jewish life is no longer so exotic – and in another fifteen years, the “newcomers” will be old-timers, no longer in need of integration, remarked one interviewee.

“It’s a beautiful thing, to have no borders, no walls,” remarked another interviewee. “And now we’re seeing the arrival of more Israelis. And each one who comes has an influence, makes things happen.”

The Holocaust recedes

Another important influence on Jewish communal life is the increasing distance from the Holocaust. Remembrance – while encouraged and practised – no longer plays a central role in community life. This is evident in communal leadership: as younger Jews ascend to leadership positions, the emphasis shifts away from commemoration and towards dealing with the complications of a vibrant, increasingly diverse community.

In the transition to new Jewish life, Ignatz Bubis, born in 1927, chair of the Frankfurt Jewish community and then chair of the Central Council, played a critical role. A Holocaust survivor himself, he affirmed a German-Jewish existence and did away with the fiction of a Jewish community sitting on packed suitcases: Jews were here to stay, also as part of a multicultural society in Germany. During his tenure, the plans for a national Holocaust memorial in Berlin, *Das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*, were realized. It was dedicated in 2005, six years after Bubis’ death.

When the Jewish community of Munich dedicated its new synagogue and cultural centre in the centre of town in 2006 – on the anniversary of the Kristallnacht pogrom no less – the community’s leader, Central Council President Charlotte Knobloch, also said it was time for Jews to “unpack their bags.” She has since modified this view, seeing dangers particularly in Germany’s extreme right-wing fringes, in mainstream anti-Israel views and

threats to Jewish religious freedom (the right to practise circumcision, for example). But Jews no longer have to justify living in Germany, to themselves or others, she stresses.

As one interviewee put it, “The fact that the generation that grew up here is beginning to unpack their proverbial suitcases is an important aspect.”

Naturally, there is anxiety among some that, with the passage of time, the Holocaust and its lessons could be forgotten – by Jews as well as gentiles. Jews have been seen as a kind of moral compass in Germany; one of the last dramatic examples of this occurred in 1998, when the renowned German writer Martin Walser – in his speech accepting Germany’s top literary prize – referred to Auschwitz as a “moral cudgel” used against Germans.

Bubis, then head of the Central Council, walked out of the award ceremony and subsequently attacked Walser’s statement, accusing him of wanting to stop discussion about the Holocaust once and for all. Though the two were eventually reconciled, the so-called “Walser-Bubis Debate” cast a shadow on relations between Jews and non-Jews in Germany.

Sandra Lustig wrote in her 2006 essay on the subject, “Like many debates about Jews and antisemitism in Germany before and since, the Walser-Bubis debate did not show mutual respect and empathy between Jews and non-Jews, but an atmosphere which permitted antisemitic sentiment to be expressed, discussed, and defended for months on end without an immediate, strong and unequivocal response by mainstream society. To be sure, there was also support for Bubis; but only after he alone had protested about Walser’s speech. It is the lack of an unequivocal public response that is problematic, much more than the views of one particular writer.”¹⁸

None could carry more weight than a survivor himself in such discussions. As one interviewee

18 Lustig, Sandra, *The Germans Will Never Forgive the Jews for Auschwitz. When Things Go Wrong in the Jewish Space: The Case of the Walser-Bubis Debate*, in “Turning the Kaleidoscope: Perspectives on European Jewry,” S. Lustig and I. Leveson, eds., Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, 2006, p. 213

remarked, “the death of Bubis as the president of the Central Council [in 1999] was actually a transition for the Jewish community ... I think that Bubis was the last moral authority.”

Both presidents who followed – Paul Spiegel and Charlotte Knobloch – had survived the Holocaust as children in hiding. Their personal histories also moved them to stand up against antisemitism, Holocaust denial and xenophobia and to support a strong military stance against dictatorships and fascism.

The new generation of leaders – as exemplified by Dr Dieter Graumann, the first President of the Central Council born after the war (in 1950) –

continues to stand up for liberal social ideals based on the collective memory of the Holocaust.

But, as one interviewee put it, “for the younger generation, the experience of the *Shoah* is no longer the most important reference point to German non-Jewish society.”

The question remains as to whether these new Jewish leaders – and the so-called special relationships between Germany and its Jewish community, as well as between Germany and Israel – are taken as seriously by German political leaders as were their predecessors. Is popular support for Israel undermined by the increasing sense of disconnection from the Holocaust?

3 Funding and philanthropy

There is no broad culture of internal Jewish philanthropy in Germany comparable to that in the United Kingdom and the United States. There are individual donors who generously support Jewish institutions of learning as well as weekly Sabbath meals, but for the most part, the work of the Central Council and of Jewish communities under its umbrella is supported by taxes and government subsidies.

Since 1990, private Jewish philanthropists from the United States – including Ronald S. Lauder and the late Sami Rohr, organizations such as the UJA-Federation, and so-called oligarchs from the Former Soviet Union, such as Lev Leviev – have poured many millions into their own projects in Germany. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) runs several programmes, including a kindergarten in Berlin (though the Madoff Ponzi scheme meant the end for many generous Jewish philanthropic foundations).

In addition, German industry foundations – from Volkswagen to Deutsche Bank, from Henkel to Thyssen – have supported programmes with a Jewish component. The Axel-Springer Foundation and the Bertelsmann Foundation run their own programmes promoting interfaith dialogue and exchange visits with Israel.

But private donors are few and far between. One interviewee said, “It’s not a particularly philanthropically driven society. And, for historical reasons, Germany has showered money on a local state and federal level on to the heads of Jewish communities and Jews for the last decades. There’s no – or a very limited – sense of philanthropic obligation. In other words, why should I, [if] the city will pay for it?”

“How many Jewish foundations are actively involved in funding in Germany today?” he asked rhetorically. “I’m not talking about German foundations, I’m talking about Jewish foundations, international Jewish foundations.

“There are no local ones, none. There’s nobody. There are a few private people here and there who give some money but there are no comparable foundations to the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe in London or the Rothschild

Brothers in France or any number of other things, the Genesis Philanthropic Group.”

Another interviewee noted “it is simply not common for people to open their purses readily, and if they do it’s for suffering, starving children in Africa, or flood victims. It’s practically unknown in Germany to donate significant sums to a museum or cultural institution or a Jewish community. ... in the US, England or other countries, Jewish communities depend totally on such funding. Not in Germany. Here, the money is the icing on the cake. For many, private funding is practically a foreign word. Things are changing slowly, though, thanks to the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe or the Pincus Fund.”

All German citizens who wish to belong to the Jewish, Protestant or Catholic communities pay a percentage of their annual income tax (an additional nine per cent) into a so-called “church tax,” whose funds are channelled through the federal government to each faith community in proportion to their membership. The government also supports the Central Council with an annual subsidy. [There are more than four million Muslims in Germany, the majority of whom are of Turkish background. Muslims in Germany do not have a contract with the Federal Government as they lack a single, unifying umbrella organization to administer these funds.]

In 2002, the German government agreed to dramatically increase its financial support for the Jewish community, whose population had nearly quadrupled since 1990. The government established an unprecedented contractual relationship with the Central Council (similar to the existing contracts with the Protestant and Catholic churches). According to the contract, Germany tripled its annual budget for the Central Council to nearly four million euros. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Central Council President Paul Spiegel signed the contract in early 2003.

Funding has increased since then. Most recently, in 2011, the government raised the figure to ten million euros annually for the coming five years.

In Germany, much of the Jewish community depends on support from state and communal

organizations. There is some resentment from the established post-war community about this state of affairs. But there is an increasing understanding of the necessity to give to others and not always to be on the receiving end.

One interviewee noted that the federal government has supported such major programmes as the Abraham Geiger Kolleg (Progressive rabbinical school) and the ELES Scholarship Programme for talented Jewish students with many millions of euros per year. The new Zentrum für Jüdische Studien in Berlin will be receiving 6.9 million euros per year for the next five years, from the federal government.

On one hand, he celebrated this support. But “the entire structure of Germany [where such programmes are financed by the state] makes it rather unclear to me how one could really make any significant structural changes if private funding were to replace state funds”.

One respondent whose programmes had received support from the Pincus Fund noted that “the administrative effort to apply for this funding is always quite significant.”

The problem with state funds is, she said, “that they tend to promote and finance existing programmes ... but for that specifically Jewish extra something, you have to go to other funders.”

According to one interviewee, most investment over the last twenty years has come from outside: “The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation and Chabad are the most influential philanthropic institutions in the last twenty years. Their religious programmes and broad infrastructure offer what many young Russian-speaking Jews are looking for: an authentic Judaism with a clearly defined structure and patterns of behaviour, reliable and meaningful norms that have authoritative character, and an infrastructure to practise a Jewish life accordingly. Furthermore, many like-minded people support each other. Finally, these organizations have the means to give financial support to their members, who are often in need.”

For new initiatives, it is important to get start-up funding from the outside, which gives you

a chance to grow outside the restrictions of the community, said one interviewee. And then, once a programme takes off, one should try to bring it under the auspices of the community. “In the end if you’re smart and if you’re careful and if you’re not political at the right moments and political at the right moments, then you will be in a position to make the structures [that be] recognize that it is in their political interests to support you,” said one interviewee. “Because if they don’t, then all the good and exciting and creative things that’ll happen will be happening outside of the structures and that’s not good for the structures.”

Another interviewee agreed that support from the outside could help shape the future and shake German Jewish leaders out of a certain complacency.

“Americans are the only ones who have the approach that we need – we need to Americanize our communal life and I think that if the money ... you know, evaluation and supervision of investment follows the money. So I would hope that American money will bring an American approach to these projects, and also, hopefully, the donors will channel the money to projects that will be effective and helpful and innovative. I don’t see this coming from anyone among the actors here, and, of course, not Russians.”

A big problem will come when the federal contracts with the Central Council run out and are reduced, noted a few interviewees.

One interviewee said he prefers, in general, to receive state funds rather than private funds. “For the effort required to apply for state funds I get ten times as much money over a longer period of time ... Private foundations are mostly less flexible, whereas the state doesn’t interfere with the content of what we do, because of the separation of church and state Private foundations could serve an important function by encouraging innovation, but please not with just 5,000 euros here or there. They really have to put much bigger sums on the table.”

Another interviewee noted, “It’s not just about getting the money today” for one project. One has to “take a much longer perspective, [toward

building] Jewish life in Germany ... there has to be a sense of caution in being willing to trade what is beneficial for my [project] today, for what is beneficial in the long-term for my people tomorrow.”

Reparations

While East Germany never paid reparations, West Germany began the process of making material reparations to survivors in the 1950s. Payments – which mostly went out to survivors in Western Europe, the United States and Israel – were handled by the Conference for Jewish Material Claims Against Germany [www.claimscon.org], which was formed in 1951 and represented twenty-three major Jewish national and international organizations.

Following the fall of the Former Soviet Union, survivors in the Eastern Bloc received payments as well.

In Western Europe, including Germany, the Claims Conference fought for the return of properties to their owners or heirs; when owners could not be found, the Claims Conference took possession, using profits from the sale of properties to fund programmes supporting Holocaust survivors around the world.

After German unification, there was a rush to determine the provenance of properties in former East Germany; for years after unification, parcels of land or other properties in former East Berlin lay undeveloped or unused, until their proper ownership could be established. Hence, even today, one sees active construction sites in former East Berlin, where the last cases of “Aryanized” properties have finally been resolved.

Since the agreement was negotiated with West Germany in 1952, Germany has paid more than sixty billion dollars in claims.

In 2000, after years of negotiations with organizations representing survivors, German government and industry established a 5.2 billion euro fund aimed at compensating former slave labourers of all backgrounds. A portion of the fund was set aside for educational projects on themes related to slave labour.

One interviewee said he regretted the fact that reparations were paid to the Claims Conference for distribution, rather than into a National Foundation that would have funded new projects.

4 Jewish community life and its organizations

The Central Council is the national unifying body for Jewry in post-war Germany. Under its umbrella are the organizations in each of Germany's sixteen states, to which most congregations belong. Larger cities have their own "united communities," as well as independent congregations that are not part of the established structure. At the bottom of the pyramid are the synagogues, with clusters in cities like Berlin, Frankfurt and Munich, and at most one or two congregations in other locations.

The pre-war system of united Jewish communities was re-established in West Germany – with communal structures under one umbrella. But the Reform Movement,¹⁹ which had been born in nineteenth century Germany, was not relevant to most survivors, who were of Eastern European origin. Thus the few active synagogues in the early post-war years were traditional, with separate seating for men and women, in order to meet the needs of the largest number of members. Alternatives were offered by American military chaplains, some of whom had reintroduced Reform Judaism to the land of its birth.

The departure of American troops after unification also meant the departure of these chaplains: local Jewish activists now had to take matters into their own hands if they wished to hold egalitarian services, given that the "united" communities were predominantly traditional.

19 The Union of Progressive Jews (UPJ) in Germany embraces both Reform and Liberal congregations. Unlike in the USA, Germany's Reform Movement does not formally accept patrilineal Jews, though it encourages participation by non-Jewish spouses and children in the hope of their conversion. Reform congregations are egalitarian, Hebrew and German are used in services and "mitzvot" (commandments) such as keeping kosher are optional. The Reform Movement was born in the early nineteenth century in Germany: the term for the non-orthodox mainstream movement was *liberales Judentum*, or *liberal-religiöses Judentum*. In Berlin's "Liberal" synagogue today, men and women sit separately and women are not counted in a *minyan* (quorum of ten Jewish adults required for certain religious obligations); on the other hand, organ music and a mixed choir are employed on the Sabbath. But UPJ member congregations are fully egalitarian.

In the 1990s, thanks largely to local activists and support from American and British organizations, Reform/Progressive congregations took off in Germany, often started by people who had attended the American military-run congregations and missed this alternative. By 2005, when the Central Council first accepted congregations that were members of the Union of Progressive Jews under its umbrella – from Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony – there were twenty such congregations across the country, served by about seven rabbis or rabbinical students. Today, according to Director Irith Michelsohn, the Union of Progressive Jews in Germany has twenty-four member communities; the community in Bielefeld (North-Rhine Westfalia) is now also under the Central Council umbrella.

One religious leader said: "We managed to change the structure of Jewish society in the last twenty years, so that the Central Council now sees itself as a pluralistic, political umbrella organization. New institutions have developed as a result: including the Allgemeine Rabbinerkonferenz [General Rabbinical Conference] ... , which connects non-orthodox rabbis, alongside the orthodox Rabbinerkonferenz ... which means that the philosophy of clear orientation according to different religious denominations is one of the most striking developments in the last twenty years."

Another religious leader said this pluralization of Jewish life would not have been possible without the massive immigration.

Political interests and goals

Today's Jewish leaders set priorities for Jewish communities and have an open line of communication with political leaders. The current President of the Central Council, Dr Dieter Graumann, and the Council's longtime General Secretary, Stephan Kramer, tend to comment publicly on matters related to antisemitism, xenophobia and the free practice of religion. If political support for Israel appears to be in danger, Jewish leaders often raise their concerns.

In numerous addresses since his election as head of the organization, Dr Graumann has said that

his main concern is to promote the continuity of Jewish life in Germany, with a special focus on youth and on the integration of former Soviet Jews.

In recent years, Europe's economic difficulties have been felt in Jewish communities. Despite government subsidies, most communities are functioning on austerity budgets. This leads them to seek services elsewhere, from external providers such as Chabad. This brings down the costs, but also has the effect that the outside providers gain influence, power and members, while the existing communities lose all three.

Outsourcing

The issue of outsourcing (i.e. outside the traditional "united communities") is becoming increasingly current, as cash-pressed communities welcome organizations such as Chabad taking on tasks that were traditionally in their domain – everything from education to social events to care of the elderly. These independent Jewish organizations are seen both as a thorn in the side of the communities and as an inspiration:

"There's a very strong non-German influence in the leadership [of some of the new programmes]" said one observer. "Some of the key people who've been involved in creating it are German Jews, but almost all of them have spent time out of the country. They have a lot of experience of Jewish life elsewhere."

The importance of (or intervention by) foreign Jewish institutions does not sit well with some in the established communal organizations. They react to outsiders with a "Don't tell us what to do" attitude, the observer said.

One interviewee said that the Berlin Chabad rabbi "makes a Jewish parade, and he should go ahead, but it's too American for me. I don't like it, but whoever wants to play along should go ahead. ... But let me add that they also do a lot of positive things. They encourage people from nought to a hundred in their Jewish identity. Mostly Russian-speaking Jews. I know two people whose parents are Jewish, and they became ultra-orthodox. Whether that's positive or not, I'm not saying. But only Chabad can do it."

"[The Chabad rabbi in Berlin] asked [the Jewish community] if he could open a primary school – we said, no problem ... but he never asked if he can make a new synagogue, or a Jewish youth centre ... so if he wants to spread himself out, go ahead, but not at the cost of the community."

"And Lauder does its thing, too, outside the community ... if people come along and say we are the true orthodox, then the united community might collapse."

Such responses may in part be a reaction to the ambivalent attitude of Jews from the United States or even elsewhere in Europe towards Jews who have chosen to live in post-war Germany. Said one respondent, "People [have] told me that as students they would go to the European Jewish student meetings in the 70s, and [the others] didn't want German Jewish students there ... and if you grow up with that, you are not going to welcome their advice later on. You say, 'Go to hell, I don't want to hear you tell me how to run my programmes.'"

The first foreign Jewish organization to establish strong ties with post-war West Germany was the American Jewish Committee. After decades of pro-democracy work in the country, the AJC opened its office in Berlin in 1997. It is involved with political and social issues, including antisemitism, reparations and Israel relations. It avoids religious matters except when religious freedom is threatened, as in the case of the recent debates in Germany on banning ritual circumcision by Jews and Muslims.

Though other American-based Jewish NGOs have run programmes in Germany and continue to do so – including the JDC and the Anti-Defamation League – no other American-based political group has established a full-time office here.

In 1988, the American-based Chabad Lubavitch organization sent its first *shaliach* (emissary) to Munich at the express request of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. The Lubavitcher Rebbe had previously considered Germany a no-go land; his attitude changed as it became clear that major changes were on the horizon, and that many Jews would be arriving there. Today, sixteen cities in Germany have a Chabad presence.

In 1997, philanthropist and former American Ambassador to Austria Ronald S. Lauder launched his first programmes in Germany; these programmes coalesced into the organization Lauder Yeshurun, including today Yeshivat Beit Zion and the Midrasha in Berlin (institutions of Torah study for men and women respectively), outreach programmes for teens and students in several locations across the country, and a kindergarten and primary school to serve the growing community of young families around the Berlin institutions.

Despite some mistrust of foreign organizations, success is convincing. Programmes by Chabad, Lauder and Limmud (the non-denominational festival of Jewish learning based on the British model) have all become successful in Germany.

What one interviewee found especially good about Limmud, for example, is that it is about “becoming engaged with Judaism on one’s own, in different ways ...” And this is particularly important for German Jewry, in its effort to be more inclusive.

The fact that the Limmud initiative comes from abroad – in this case, from the United Kingdom – is not at all problematic, this respondent said. “It’s a very Jewish initiative, not specifically British. But one difference is that in the UK, Limmud volunteers are often rabbis, Jewish educators and otherwise socially engaged in their professional lives, whereas in Germany this is not so much the case.” She suggested that some degree of professionalization might be a good idea: “The notion of creating a Limmud office [in Germany] is worth considering.”

One interviewee also finds that Chabad has had a positive influence: “Chabad understands how to work with people – not only young people – [it understands] how to give them a new way of motivating them and making them interested and realizing that being Jewish doesn’t mean being stuck in the 80s.”

4.1. Religious institutions and religious life

The increasing diversity of Jewish life has created the need for more religious educators and rabbis. This has led to the creation of two new rabbinical seminaries since 1999 – Reform and Orthodox.

In 2003, the first of two new rabbinical conferences was founded, both under the Central Council umbrella: the forty-five member Orthodox Rabbinerkonferenz Deutschland (Orthodox). Two years later, the Allgemeine Rabbinerkonferenz (for Conservative, Reform and other non-orthodox rabbis) was founded.

The latter’s twenty-seven members include representatives of Liberal/Progressive/Masorti congregations, including five female rabbis (a revolution for Germany, whose first post-war female rabbi was Bea Wyler of Switzerland, since retired). Each rabbinical organization has a *Beth Din* (Jewish court of law) that can approve conversions and render other Jewish legal judgements.

This growth in diversity reflects a major sea change in Jewish life in Germany.

The small post-war Jewish communities – consisting mostly of survivors from Eastern Europe – were traditional in nature, so as to allow the broadest possible participation. As mentioned, the phenomenal growth of the Jewish population since 1990 changed all that.

As one activist in the Progressive movement put it, the first years after 1990 were marked by “shock and chaos. And now it’s about consolidation. That’s been under way for about ten years now.”

Change has taken place on many fronts:

- Reform (Progressive) Judaism: The departure of the American Army Chaplains paved the way for the formation of homegrown Reform or Progressive congregations; ultimately, the World Union for Progressive Judaism backed its German branch in seeking greater influence and recognition from the Central Council. The Union of Progressive Jews in Germany launched its rabbinical seminary, the Abraham Geiger Kolleg in 1999.²⁰
- Masorti: Germany’s first official Masorti community – linked to the American-based Conservative movement – was founded in August 2002 in Berlin, with the goal of providing Jewish education for children, students and adults within the

20 See <http://abraham-geiger-kolleg.de/welcome.html>

framework of the Einheitsgemeinde – the united Jewish community. Germany’s only official Masorti congregation is under the community’s umbrella.

- Chabad: the Chabad Lubavitch movement entered Germany in 1988 and today has twenty-five centres throughout the country. Some are part of the local united communities. As in other countries where Chabad has made inroads, in some German Jewish communities there is an ambivalent relationship towards it, which some suspect of recruiting people away from community synagogues and schools. At its best, Chabad complements existing communal programmes and cooperates with the existing community.²¹
- Lauder: Lauder Yeshurun in Berlin, which is also independent of the official community, introduced its first programmes in 1997 with seminars and summer camps for teens in Rostock, Halle and Aachen. Lauder Yeshurun opened a Yeshiva in 2000 in Berlin, and the Lauder Midrasha for women in 2001 in Frankfurt, which later moved to Berlin. A community of young families has grown up around these institutions in east Berlin, served currently by orthodox synagogue services at Brunnenstrasse 33 and Rykestrasse 53 and a range of other communal and educational services.²²
- Renewal: several rabbis and cantors in Germany have received their ordination from the American-based ALEPH Jewish Renewal movement. Founded in the United States in 1993, this egalitarian movement held its first official gathering in Berlin in 2007. Since then, adherents have established a small, independent congregation that meets regularly in Berlin.²³

A related development is the construction of new synagogues. Since 1990, nearly 30²⁴ new structures have been built across the country, some on the sites of synagogues destroyed in the Kristallnacht pogrom of 9 – 10 November 1938.

Ulrich Knufinke of the Bet Tefila Research Center for Jewish Architecture in Europe at the Technical

University of Braunschweig (it also has a branch at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem), finds the synagogues in Dresden (2001), Cologne (2004), Munich (2006) and Mainz (2010) to be the most remarkable architecturally.²⁵

Interviewees generally praised the new diversity of Jewish life in Germany.

One commented: “In all, the development is quite positive. There are a lot of possibilities; you can really enjoy Jewish life. There are many options, whether in education, culture, religion, synagogues, events.” A living Jewish community also includes its cemeteries, she noted.

Berlin, with more than a dozen active synagogues, has the most diverse offerings of any Jewish community in Germany. “We have a Sephardi congregation ... for Jews who come from outside the European countries, for example from Arab countries, from Bulgaria, the Islamic republics of the Former Soviet Union ... we have Conservative [Masorti], Reform and Orthodox of course ... There is something for everyone. We have Chabad, we have Lauder, we really have everything.”

Not only in Berlin have things changed. “Twenty years ago, there were only a few ‘weirdos’ who wanted a non-orthodox, egalitarian service, but today we have this in many communities,” said one interviewee. “For example, at the Limmud festival [in Germany] we have parallel services and it is completely normal; and at the last Youth Congress of the ZWST [Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland, or Central Agency for Social Services for Jews in Germany] they also had parallel services – and that worked, too.”

Limmud, as a trans-denominational forum, allows participants to try out something new, she noted. “In the best case, you slip into a [religious] service that you’d never visit back home, or wouldn’t be able to visit. Then things get pretty interesting.”

Ultimately, the goal should be that people with little background but growing interest should learn how to do things at home, she added. This is one purpose of community Shabbat meals or Passover meals to help the immigrants who

21 See: www.chabadberlin.de

22 See: www.lauderyeshurun.de

23 See: www.ohel-hachidusch.org

24 See: www.zentralratjuden.de/de/topic/387.html

25 Based on interview conducted by the author. See also: <http://www.zentralratjuden.de/de/topic/384.html>.

came here on the “Jewish ticket” strengthen their connection to Jewish life, even though they no longer need the ticket. And it’s a difficult task, she noted.

Diversity aside, synagogue attendance remains low, particularly among young adults, some observers say. But the picture is not all bad, noted one interviewee: “Even in smaller communities, congregations are starting to offer services during the week.”

The fact that it is easier to purchase kosher food also encourages people to keep traditions, he noted, adding that the Internet has a lot to do with this. “You can buy [food] online and don’t have to visit Strasbourg or Antwerp any more.”

How do Jews who grew up in the Former Soviet Union, with its anti-religious ideology, respond to the diversity of Jewish offerings in Germany? Perhaps surprisingly, they still tend to choose the traditional road, when given the choice, one interviewee noted.

“It seems particularly important to Jewish parents from a Russian-speaking background that a rabbi should be an Orthodox man, because that’s the traditional image they have of a rabbi. They miss it from their own childhood.”

But another interviewee noted that one has to take seriously “the fact that Russian-speaking Jews – particularly the younger generation – are often not interested in connecting with traditional religious teachings, but rather seek their own interpretation of tradition. So the need for informal gatherings – without a teacher – has to be met.”

4.2. Jewish education

Rebuilding Jewish educational institutions in post-unification Germany has been one of the biggest tasks facing the communities since 1990. The offerings have burgeoned, though there are gaps.

In an effort to coordinate and support the plethora of programmes – which, for the most part, are unconnected – the Central Council announced the formation of a new educational department in September 2012. Its task is to promote Jewish educational programmes “that are grounded in tradition,” to bring them under

one roof, to promote innovative ideas and share best practices.

The good news is that there is a lot more choice in the *smörgåsbord* of Jewish life in Germany. But the bad news is that too few Jews show an interest in Jewish education.

This was one conclusion of a report on “Jews and Jewish Education in Germany Today,” for which researchers interviewed some 1,200 Jews in 2008-2009. Though they may identify Jewishly, Jews often show little interest in religious education. However, topics relating to Israel are more popular, indicating that Jews in Germany still identify strongly with the Jewish State.²⁶

Some prefer to see the glass as half-full. Perhaps not all Jews are sending their children to Jewish schools, but the new schools function quite well, said one interviewee. “It was unimaginable twenty years ago.”

The greatest changes in the educational landscape are to be found in the kindergartens and in higher education.

Many new Jewish pre-schools and primary schools have opened in the last two decades, both community-run and private (Chabad, Lauder, Masorti). As mentioned, for the first time since the Second World War, Germany has rabbinical seminaries. But when it comes to Jewish secondary schools, there is only one: in Berlin.

The kindergartens are key, as entire families can be reached through them.

“Whether in Chemnitz or Duisburg, relatively small communities have also managed to open Jewish kindergartens,” said one interviewee. “It is an important building block, particularly

²⁶ Executive summary, *Jews and Jewish Education in Germany Today* Volume 1: The Research; Principal Investigator Eliezer Ben-Rafael, for The Potsdam Moses Mendelssohn Zentrum and the Potsdam University, 2010. The study was done for the Jerusalem-based L.A. Pincus Fund for Jewish Education in the Diaspora, in conjunction with the Chais Family Foundation, Pears Foundation, the Schusterman Foundation Israel, Severyn Ashkenazy, the Rosalind & Arthur Gilbert Foundation, and the Edmond J. Safra Foundation. p. 9

because in kindergartens one works with parents, too – probably to a much greater extent than in primary schools.”

According to the Central Council, eighteen cities in Germany have Jewish kindergartens, and Berlin has four alone, including those run by the Jewish community itself, by Chabad, by Lauder and the JDC, whose *Bambinim* kindergarten and “family club”²⁷ is a meeting place for Israeli parents.²⁸

Unfortunately, most communities are unable to afford the next natural step – opening Jewish primary schools. Berlin has three, while the following cities have one each: Cologne, Munich, Dusseldorf, Hamburg, Frankfurt am Main and Stuttgart.

The Pincus report confirmed that when it comes to providing Jewish education for their children, most Jewish communities in Germany lack financial resources and qualified personnel. Some cities have barely enough children to keep Jewish kindergartens going.²⁹

But one interviewee suggested that the number of primary schools is actually growing gradually, and that religion classes in Judaism are now offered in state schools, alongside religion classes for Protestants and Catholics – for example in Hamburg, Munich and Frankfurt.

“There’s been a lot of change in the realm of informal education,” she said. “You always had summer camps and youth centres. What I notice in Berlin, in particular, is that various synagogues are trying to start programmes aimed at attracting children and young families. Twenty years ago, no one would have been interested. You’d go to the synagogue and that was it.”

A Jewish educator in Berlin noted that non-Jewish as well as Jewish children are enrolled in most Jewish schools. This is partly due to the fact that many schools are supported by state funds and must be open to children from any religious

background. “When our school opened in 1986, we had twenty-five children. Today we have about 300,” she said.

4.3. Academic Jewish studies and adult education

Higher Jewish education has also seen a boom in the past decade. While there have long been Jewish studies programmes attracting predominantly non-Jewish students, institutions aimed at Jewish educators have only just begun to return to Germany.

“Jewish intellectual life is embarrassingly low,” said one interviewee. A milestone is, he said, “the successful import of existing programmes from outside ... over the last few years.”

Jewish studies: secular and religious

Recently, several universities in the Berlin area launched a new umbrella organization for advanced secular Jewish studies programmes: the Zentrum Jüdische Studien Berlin-Brandenburg, initiated in 2012, binds together programmes offered by Berlin’s Humboldt University, Free University, Technical University and the University of Potsdam, which includes the Abraham Geiger College and the Moses Mendelssohn Centre for European Jewish Studies. It is to receive funding for five years from the Federal Ministry for Education and Research.

The first post-war Jewish academic institution established under the Central Council umbrella in Germany was the College of Jewish Studies in Heidelberg,³⁰ founded in 1979. As the Central Council states, it was founded to “revitalize research and study in the field of Jewish culture, history and religion in Germany, following in the tradition of the Academy for the Science of Judaism in Berlin.” It offers bachelors and masters degrees in Jewish studies, certification for teachers of Jewish religion and a bachelor’s degree in Jewish communal service. It is also a centre of training for scholars, teachers of Jewish religion and rabbis. Rabbinical candidates complete their ordination at the two accredited seminaries in Germany.

The accredited college, affiliated with the University of Heidelberg, is run by the

27 See <http://bambinim-berlin.de>

28 See www.zentralratjuden.de/de/topic/586.html

29 Op cit., Executive summary, *Jews and Jewish Education in Germany Today* p. 8

30 See: www.hfjs.eu

Central Council and is open to applicants of any denomination.

The Institute for the History of German Jewry, located in Hamburg, was founded in 1966 as the first research institution in West Germany to focus solely on this topic.³¹

The Moses Mendelssohn Centre for European Jewish Studies (MMZ),³² an interdisciplinary research centre, was founded in 1992 and named after the eighteenth century Enlightenment philosopher. It is affiliated with the University of Potsdam's Jewish Studies department.

A Jewish Social Work Degree Programme³³ was launched in 2007 by the University of Applied Sciences Erfurt, under the auspices of the ZWST. It offers a bachelor's degree in Jewish social work for employees of Jewish communities in Germany; in 2012, rabbinical candidates at the Rabbinerseminar zu Berlin were enrolled in this programme. Part-time and correspondence courses are available.

Touro College Berlin³⁴ was founded in 2003 as an affiliate of an American based network of Touro College programmes, a Jewish institution founded by the late Rabbi Bernard Lander. It offers a bachelor's degree in international business management and a masters programme in Holocaust communication and tolerance studies.

Leo Baeck Summer University,³⁵ an accredited graduate Jewish studies programme affiliated with Humboldt University, was opened in 2006. Its student body is international and the language of study is English.

Training of rabbis and other Jewish educators

The launching of rabbinical studies was a game changer in Germany, noted one rabbi, who was ordained abroad. Twenty years ago, there was no option here for would-be rabbis, the interviewee said. "Today there are two rabbinical schools – liberal and orthodox. And to some extent

it is local people, from Jewish communities themselves, who study there. It's a huge change."

As mentioned, the Union of Progressive Jews in Germany founded its rabbinical seminary, the Abraham Geiger Kolleg at the University of Potsdam, in 1999, and opened its doors to students in 2001. A cantorial programme was added in 2008. The Geiger Kolleg, which is affiliated with the Central Council, has since ordained sixteen rabbis and invested three cantors. The seminary cooperates with the College of Jewish Studies in Heidelberg, and is planning to expand its programme to prepare Conservative rabbis as well. There is a close cooperation with the General Rabbinical Conference in Germany.

As one interviewee noted, "the opening of this seminary made rabbinical training in Germany possible again. And women could also be trained as rabbis, for the first time since after the war."

In addition, there is one significant new development: since autumn 2013, the School of Jewish Theology at the University of Potsdam, in cooperation with the Geiger Kolleg, has offered the possibility to pursue rabbinical or cantorial studies under its auspices. This is a groundbreaking development in the German university system, which until now, has only subsidized Catholic and Protestant theological training programmes. (Islamic programmes were also introduced recently.) With forty-seven students enrolled in its first class, the programme is oversubscribed. All the instructors are Jewish. Funding comes from the German federal government, the state of Brandenburg and the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

In 2009, the Rabbinerseminar zu Berlin was established as the successor to the pre-war Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary of the same name by the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation. It has ordained eight rabbis since. The seminary, whose candidates now also study Jewish social work at the University of Applied Sciences in Erfurt, also has a cooperative relationship with the College of Jewish Studies in Heidelberg. There is also close cooperation with the Orthodox Rabbinical Conference of Germany (ORD).

31 See: www.igd-j-hh.de

32 See: www.mmz-potsdam.de

33 See: www.fh-erfurt.de

34 See: www.touro-college.de

35 See: www.projekte.hu-berlin.de

The Lauder Midrasha for women was founded in Frankfurt in 2001 and moved to Berlin in 2006. Students pursue basic Torah studies, Jewish law, Hebrew language and Jewish tradition. Most of the students in the Lauder Midrasha and seminary come from Russian-speaking backgrounds, and choose to lead an observant lifestyle, even if their parents did not.

One interviewee who has done research on young Jews from that community who became religious, said she was “fascinated [by] how many of [them] not only start to practise a religious Jewish life, but teach their parents and their own children to preserve the tradition – how to celebrate Shabbat and the holidays, how to cook kosher... Their commitment to religious norms and their perception of Orthodox Judaism as the one and only true, authentic way of life was astonishing to me. Many of them not only become multipliers on a private level, but also on a professional one: they are the rabbis, cantors, teachers, youth group coordinators, etc., of today and tomorrow. It is in their hands to change the communities’ face in terms of religion.”

At Chabad in Berlin, most rabbinical students have come from the United States to conduct some of their studies at its Yeshiva Gedolah, which opened in 2007. These students generally are only in Germany for a semester or two, during which they are involved in outreach programmes of Chabad in Berlin.

Continuing education and student organizations

The Jewish community of Bamberg opened a Jewish House of Learning in 2009; its “Bet Midrash Russit” aims to reach Jews who emigrated from the Former Soviet Union.

The Bundesverband Jüdischer Studierender in Deutschland (BJSD) was founded in 1968 for Jewish students aged between eighteen and thirty-five. [See section on youth organizations]

The Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich Studienwerk (ELES) is a scholarship programme for talented Jewish students and doctoral candidates who are citizens of Germany or other European Union member states, or for resident foreign students in accredited institutes of higher education in Germany, the EU and Switzerland. It is named after the late Ernst

Ludwig Ehrlich, a German-born, Swiss Jewish philosopher who escaped Nazi Germany by fleeing to Switzerland in 1943. He was European director of B’nai B’rith from 1961 to 1994. The programme is supported by Germany’s Ministry for Education and Research.³⁶

One interviewee said she considered that ELES had already made a huge contribution to networking between Jewish students in various disciplines.

Other Jewish educational institutions

The Europäische Janusz Korczak Akademie (European Janusz Korczak Academy) was founded in 2009, in memory of, and inspired by, the pedagogue Janusz Korczak, the director of a Jewish orphanage in Poland, who famously went to his death at Treblinka, refusing to abandon his pupils. This humanistic Jewish educational initiative is open to all sectors of society. It offers family programmes, seminars and pilot projects with scientific and humanitarian goals. Children’s rights and human rights are its central concern.³⁷

Founded in 1992, HATiKVA is an educational and exchange centre focusing on Jewish history and culture. It is located in Dresden, in the former East German state of Saxony. It cooperates closely with the Jewish community of Dresden and the state of Saxony.³⁸

The Kulturakademie für Kinder und Jugendliche in Düsseldorf, founded in 2007, works with children, youth and young adults.³⁹

Adult education by and for Jews

Tarbut is a German-Jewish cultural congress organized approximately every eighteen months by Rachel Salamander and Michael Brenner (University of Munich). The event features invited speakers and focuses on specific Jewish topics. It is held at Schloss Elmau (in the Bavarian Alps near Munich). News of Tarbut is spread by word of mouth – it has no website.⁴⁰

36 See: www.eles-studienwerk.de

37 See: www.ejka.org

38 See <http://hatikva.de>

39 See: www.jgd.de/unsere-gemeinde/kulturakademie

40 See: www.judentum.net/kultur/tarbut.htm

Limmud, the popular British Jewish cultural and educational initiative created in England in 1980, has been active in Germany since 2006 and encourages participation by Jews of all orientations, ages and backgrounds. Limmud.de holds one four-day event annually near Berlin and two or three one-day events around the country. In Germany, this volunteer-run programme makes a special effort to reach out to Jews from the Former Soviet Union.⁴¹

Bet Deborah is a conference focusing on female Jewish educators, rabbis and cantors. Founded in Germany in 1998, it has since held several events in Berlin and elsewhere in Europe. The most recent conference took place in February 2013 in Vienna.⁴²

Jewish educational programmes open to all

Many non-Jews in Germany are drawn to Jewish programming, education and museums. This has its positive and negative sides.

As one study participant put it, “Academic Jewish studies in this country suffer from a distinct lack of Jews, which means that the perspective on them is very ‘not Jewish.’ I don’t say non-Jewish but a ‘not Jewish’ perspective.”

Conversely, those Jews involved in non-theological, academic Jewish studies “are among the few people in the world whose discourse was not changed by the Holocaust,” he said.

Cynicism aside, there are enough interested parties to keep such programmes going.

Three cities – Berlin, Frankfurt am Main and Munich – offer adult education courses through their Jüdische Volkshochschulen (Jewish adult education schools) and are open to all. They offer Hebrew and Yiddish language courses, as well as courses on Jewish history, religion, philosophy, art and Israel.

The Salomo Birnbaum Society for Yiddish was founded in 1995 in Hamburg, with the goal of promoting and preserving the Yiddish language and culture. It is named after Salomo Birnbaum

(1891-1989), who was a lecturer in Yiddish in pre-war Hamburg.⁴³

These programmes go a long way towards building bridges between Jews and non-Jews in Germany.

But there should be more such programmes, one interviewee said. “Local educational centres are missing from the picture.”

4.4. Jewish culture

There is a popular thirst for information about Jewish life in Germany, among Jews and non-Jews. This is evidenced in the success of “open house” events at Jewish venues and in the attendance at Jewish cultural events of all kinds.

Increasingly, with the distance to the Holocaust, cultural events are focusing less on the dark past and more on the richness of Jewish life today.

Yiddish Summer Weimar is a six-week long summer festival that began in 2000, founded and directed by keyboard player Alan Bern of the “Brave Old World” klezmer group. It now also offers a winter programme as well.⁴⁴

The Berlin/Potsdam Jewish Film Festival, founded in 1995, is one of the oldest Jewish film festivals in Europe, showcasing new films that explore Jewish life in Germany and around the world. It was founded by Nicola Galliner.⁴⁵

Jewish cultural festivals in Berlin,⁴⁶ Erfurt, Munich and other cities offer an opportunity for non-Jews to enjoy world-class Jewish music and other performances, lectures and guided tours of local Jewish sites.

One interviewee said, “the festivals of Jewish culture that exist in many towns today, in particular the mother of all festivals, in Berlin ... have become known outside the Jewish community, even across the country.”

“There has been much more happening in the cultural realm than in the religious realm,” he

41 See: <http://limmud.de/en>

42 See: www.bet-debora.de

43 See: <http://yiddish-sources.com/salomo-birnbaum-society-hamburg>

44 See: www.yiddishsummer.eu

45 See: www.jffb.de

46 See: www.juedische-kulturtag.org

added. Many of the new immigrants “define their Judaism culturally, through music or literature ... so that is the area where there has been a lot of initiative.”

One interviewee noted that in the cultural realm, too, “... the Holocaust is receding as a theme. While in the 1990s, cultural events focused primarily on the *Shoah* – let’s say memorial events, panel discussions, exhibitions and the like – today cultural events focus on many different aspects of Jewish identity. And especially younger Jews go to concerts and parties – it establishes a normality of Jewish life in Germany. This includes the parties of DJs ‘Meshugge’, ‘Sababba’ or ‘Mesiba’.”

Points of contact with Jewish culture have multiplied enormously through integration, and the fact that there are more Jewish people here who could be interested, said another interviewee. But “the growing interest among non-Jews [since 1990] plays a role, too ... because you can’t organize a Jewish film festival or any major event” without interest from the public at large.

Publications and media

Since 2001, the Central Council has published its own monthly newspaper, *Zukunft* (Future), in German and Russian. It covers issues related to integration policy, culture, community life and religion.

The Central Council also puts out the Jewish weekly, *Jüdische Allgemeine*,⁴⁷ which was founded in 1946 as a regional Jewish newspaper in Düsseldorf. The paper later moved to Bonn and then in 1999 to Berlin. It has gone through phases of being published bi-monthly.

According to the paper’s website, the paper follows in the tradition of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, which was founded in 1837 and which, in 1922, became the official organ of the Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith. Its last edition was published on 3 November 1938, a few days before the Kristallnacht pogrom against Jews and their property across Germany and Austria.

47 See: www.juedische-allgemeine.de

The magazine *Jüdisches Berlin*⁴⁸ is published about ten times annually by the Jewish Community of Berlin, in both German and Russian.

Golem,⁴⁹ a Berlin-based literary magazine in German, French and English, was organized by volunteers and published four issues, the most recent being on the subject of circumcision (with poetry, essays and art). It is currently defunct due to lack of funding.

The independent German-language monthly *Jüdische Zeitung*⁵⁰ was launched in 2005 by the Berlin-based Werner Media Group. The group has also published the Russian-language Jewish monthly, *Evrejskaja gazeta*,⁵¹ since 2002.

Ariella Books⁵² was founded in 2010 by Berlin-based filmmaker Myriam Halberstam with the aim of producing Jewish-themed children’s books in the German language.

Jewish Voice from Germany is an English-language newspaper started in early 2012 by German Jewish writer Dr Rafael Seligmann and published quarterly out of Berlin. Its aim is to connect Jews with non-Jews, and Germany with the world.⁵³

The website Hagalil onLine Jüdischer Kultur- u. Informationsdienst e. V.⁵⁴ was established by David Gall in 1995; he and Eva Ehrlich, both Jews living in Munich, continue to publish this online forum. Its main goals are to fight antisemitism and right-wing extremism on the Internet, and to provide data on Judaism, Jews and Israel. It is a forum for information about current Jewish life in Germany. It is supported by donations and advertisements.

There are very few Jewish media outlets in Germany and most of them are subsidized by the Jewish community or the Central Council. Some mainstream radio outlets broadcast multicultural programmes and specifically include Jewish material. The list of regular Jewish-themed

48 See: www.jg-berlin.org/en/about-us/juedisches-berlin.html

49 See: www.golem-journal.de

50 See: www.j-zeit.de

51 See: www.e-gazeta.de

52 See: www.ariella-books.com

53 See: <http://jewish-voice-from-germany.de/cms>

54 See: www.hagalil.com

broadcasts includes Deutschlandradio Kultur, which broadcasts a Jewish programme each Friday (*Aus der jüdischen Welt/From the Jewish World*), as well as short documentaries before Jewish festivals. Other Jewish programmes are broadcast regularly by Deutschlandfunk (*Shalom*), Hessischer Rundfunk (*Jüdische Welt/Jewish World*), Norddeutscher Rundfunk (*Shabbat shalom*), Kulturradio des RBB (*Shalom*), Bayerischer Rundfunk (*Shalom*) and WDR.

4.5 Preservation of Jewish heritage

Jewish heritage issues in Germany include both the preservation of historic sites and the viability of Jewish life today. They include efforts to place Berlin's historic Weissensee Cemetery on the UNESCO list,⁵⁵ for example, and to protect the rights of Jews to practise religious rituals such as circumcision and *kashrut* (Jewish dietary laws).

Across Germany, efforts have been made to preserve and restore Jewish cemeteries and synagogues that were destroyed under the Nazis. For decades, non-Jewish activists have fought to rescue forgotten Jewish history from oblivion; they have collected artefacts, excavated *mikvaot* (ritual baths), interviewed eyewitnesses to the persecution of Jews, and reached out to Jews who fled Nazi Germany, re-establishing contact with some.

In many towns and cities where original synagogues remain standing, the buildings have been restored for new purposes: as interfaith meeting centres or as Jewish museums, for example.

Recognition of such projects has been given annually since 2000 by Arthur Obermayer, an American philanthropist with roots in Germany. His Obermayer Awards are given to five individuals “who have made outstanding voluntary contributions toward preserving and recording the Jewish history, heritage, culture and/or remnants of local German communities.”⁵⁶

Interest in Jewish culture and heritage is high in Germany: the Jewish Museum Berlin is among the most visited museums in the country.

Said one interviewee, the museum “offers an amazing amount of programmes, it reaches so many people, that I think it is a very positive aspect of the transmission of Jewish life in Germany.”

Another remarkable project is the “Synagogues in Germany – A Virtual Reconstruction” carried out by students in the Information and Communications Technology Section of the Architecture Department at the Technical University of Darmstadt.⁵⁷ The project, begun in 1994 – after a wave of antisemitic incidents in Germany – consists of virtual depictions of more than fifteen synagogues that were destroyed during the Nazi era. The project's purpose is primarily to emphasize the loss represented by the destruction of these synagogues, and to place their history in the context of the destruction of German and European Jewry. More than 1,000 synagogues were destroyed during the “Kristallnacht” pogrom.

4.6 Young adult (eighteen to thirty-five) engagement, leadership development

Both the Central Council and ZWST consider outreach to youth to be a priority. There is considerable concern that the great benefit of the immigration will come to nothing, if the younger generation is lost to the Jewish community. Many young adults already do leave Germany for Israel, the United States or Canada – or they migrate within Germany, leaving smaller towns or cities for the metropolis of Berlin.

The ZWST and Central Council sponsor an annual youth congress with the aim to air the concerns of the younger generation and to empower them.

According to one interviewee, “the biggest challenge today is to win over the youth. The institutions are there, but now one has to invest massive amounts of time and energy to attract people. The main problem in this is that, as far as I can tell, there is little readiness for this among the leadership councils ... Dr Graumann has shown some positive initiative in this way: he has said that he's going to do things differently.”

55 See: www.dw.de/unesco-bid-for-berlin-jewish-cemetery/a-1695318-1

56 See www.obermayer.us/award

57 See www.tu-darmstadt.de/vorbeischauen/aktuell/nachrichten_1/synagogenexhibition.en.jsp

There are numerous programmes aimed at youth, including the ZWST's "18+" group, the leadership training programme "Brückenschlag" (Bridge Building); and the BJSD, the national Jewish student union. Major cities have their own programmes, and there are also groups catering to Orthodox and Reform youth.

An issue of increasing importance is the question of membership for those who do not have a Jewish mother, and who thus cannot be considered halachically Jewish. The Central Council does not accept non-halachic Jews as members of Jewish communities; however, it does support some programmes that are inclusive, such as the Youth Congress and "Jung und Jüdisch."⁵⁸

At the 2011 Congress, numerous participants, all from the Former Soviet Union, challenged the Central Council to find a way to include them, or lose them. While Dr Graumann, President of the Council, expressed empathy for these students, he reiterated that he could not change 2,000 years of Jewish law simply by petitioning some rabbis in Israel.

The issue is particularly poignant in Germany, since intermarriage was a protection for some Jews during the Holocaust. In addition, people with Jewish names (thus Jewish fathers) in the Former Soviet Union experienced discrimination as Jews. Ultimately, for many, a positive Jewish identity emerged from that negative experience. This process describes the experience of many of those who came to Germany on the so-called 'Jewish ticket' in the 1990s. The German government understandably did not want to be in the business of distinguishing who was Jewish. This was left to Jewish communities. And as Germany's official Jewish body does not recognize patrilineal Jews (unlike the American branch of the Reform Movement), this leaves a sizeable number of the new immigrants in a state of limbo.

The demand by students to be included is sure to pick up steam in the next few years (there is even a new group in Frankfurt calling itself "doppel:halb" [double/half] initiated by young "patrilineal Jews").⁵⁹ While the option of conversion may be taken up by some, many are

likely to reject the notion that, after decades of persecution as Jews in the Former Soviet Union, they must now undergo an orthodox conversion in order to belong to the community.

Meanwhile, although there are no official data, anecdotally intermarriage is a problem here, as in most Diaspora communities.

More activities are needed that bring youth together, interviewees agreed.

Jewish youth activities include summer camps and programmes such as "Jewrovision," an annual song contest that, since 2002, has brought together many hundreds of young Jews from across the country. There is also an active urban youth culture, mostly consisting of Israeli or Russian-speaking parties or clubs. For example, in Berlin, Israeli DJ Aviv Netter hosts regular "Berlin Meschugge" dance parties; young Jews from the Russian-speaking scene flock to the popular "Russendisko" parties of Jewish writer and DJ Wladimir Kaminer and friends.

Younger Jews in Germany are linked through several organizations:

The Association of Jewish Students in Germany – Bundesverband Jüdischer Studierender in Deutschland – was founded in 1968 for students aged eighteen to thirty-five. It is sponsored by the Central Council, with funding from the Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and Children. It also receives funding from the Jewish Agency for Israel.⁶⁰

Recently, there have been efforts to establish a non-denominational Hillel organization in Germany.

Netzer is the youth organization of the Union for Progressive Judaism. The German branch was launched in 2000 in Hanover with a Liberal summer camp. Three years later, it became an official member of Netzer Olami, the international Zionist youth organization affiliated with the Reform Movement. Netzer now runs three camp programmes per year and is affiliated with Jung und Jüdisch.⁶¹

58 See: www.jungundjuedisch.de

59 See: www.doppelhalb.de

60 See: www.bjsd.de/bjsd

61 See <http://jugend.liberaale-juden.de>

Jung und Jüdisch (Young and Jewish) is an organization of Jewish adults aged between eighteen and thirty-five. It promotes an “open, pluralistic and progressive approach” to Judaism. Members can have either a Jewish mother or father. It is the official representative of TaMaR in Germany – an organization that promotes Reform Judaism – since 2004.⁶²

Jewish Experience in Frankfurt is a forum for Jewish students and young adults, which offers them a chance to meet, build friendships and professional contacts, exchange opinions and ideas. According to the group’s website, participants come from Frankfurt as well as Hamburg, Stuttgart, Essen, Fulda, Munich, Darmstadt, Mainz, Wiesbaden, Bad Homburg and also from abroad (Israel, Austria, France, England and so on). It is funded by the youth centre of the Jewish community of Frankfurt, through contributions from participants, and through the Central Council.⁶³

Said one interviewee: “They have actually created a successful ongoing programme for people in their twenties and thirties ... [They have] dinners, they have lectures, they have programmes, and they’ve been successful in getting the twenty to forty crowd, not just students but also young families and young professionals.”

“Jewish Experience ... flourishes by its diverse religious, social and intellectual programme and its growing community, which draws people from remote places,” said another interviewee. She added that “the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, Chabad and Limmud e.V. continue to succeed in engaging and motivating the young generation, according to their religious/cultural/social needs and interests.”

She feels strongly that an alternative to the status quo is needed. “The *Einheitsgemeinde* [united community] still fails to develop adequate programmes for young people.”

Another respondent says this alternative is already in formation: “Young people are mostly active outside the Jewish communal institutions. They create alternative networks, which – unlike those

of the Jewish communities – are rather informal and have a low bar for admission: you don’t have to be a member and you don’t have to give a certain amount of time ... ”

“There are lots of possibilities, many institutions, groups and associations in Berlin – actually, all over Germany,” said another interviewee. “It was always important to me to work outside the structure of an official united community, because you’re just more flexible. Because I think that many of the most interesting things don’t fit into a pre-arranged structure. The structures themselves are very important, they have a lot of important functions and manage things well in the social realm, but when it comes to cultural and other realms, I always had the feeling that these structures were more of an obstacle.”

For example, she said, “When I was a child, there was no institution that really spoke to me as a non-Orthodox Jew in Germany. But now there is Jung und Jüdisch-Junior/Netzer for people up to the age of eighteen, and then Jung und Jüdisch for those over eighteen ... they are given leadership training ...”

According to one interviewee, young Jewish adults are “doing exciting, creative, interesting things that change from one day to the next and they meet people from different places. So if they have the possibility of expressing themselves religiously or politically or any other way, as they’re supposed to at their age and they will, then there’s a chance. If you try and put them into a box which is not the box that fits who they are, that’s never going to work.”

“The problem is ... they’re not going to synagogue and they’re not going to join ... ”

One interviewee pointed to a recent feature article in which students at the Abraham Geiger College called Germany “the best country for Jews in the world” today. ... So young people really do see the possibilities, but they have to be created now.”

Major events like the Youth Congress and Jewrovision reflect “totally new structures and a totally new self-confidence, but also, most importantly, they represent a tendency toward fragmentation,” said one respondent. “Especially among the youth, and above all those who have

62 See: www.jungundjuedisch.de

63 See: www.jewishexperience.de

grown up here in Germany, you can see that many who have a much closer connection with the Jewish religion and the community feel much more comfortable here ...

“The ZWST today has quite a bit of competition, from Lauder, from Chabad. Jung und Jüdisch has already made a summer camp ... and that’s what generates this fragmentation, the nostalgia for the good old days ...”

He noted that the last five years have seen the generation of several new initiatives for students, such as the new association JuBuk – Jewish educational seminars, some of them in Russian, supported by the L.A. Pincus Fund for Jewish Education in the Diaspora and the Jewish Agency for Israel.⁶⁴

There are also numerous clubs, called “Stammtische” in Germany. Virtually all of these programmes are open to non-halachic participants, so they don’t have intimidating restrictions. Price is also important: to attract a young public, programmes must be subsidized.

In fact, ‘separate but equal’ could be a positive development, said one respondent: “Since most Jews in Germany are not religious, in the future there should be cultural clubs parallel to the religiously defined institutions of the Jewish community. They would create their programming independently from the religious realm – kind of like the American model: a separation between the congregation and the community centres.”

One interviewee urged that youth programming be more proactive in helping participants answer “their burning questions: How do I define myself in terms of Judaism? Where and how do I belong to the Jewish community? How to find a Jewish spouse? Also, how to find an adequate job?”

“It is important to make Judaism attractive for the younger generations, as a cultural space where not only religious traditions are cultivated but also a certain *Weltanschauung* [worldview],” suggested another interviewee. “And I find that questions are more important than answers, debate is more important than rigid consensus: a culture

of reading, learning and arguing, that can laugh about itself.”

4.7 Innovation and social entrepreneurship

Innovation and entrepreneurship are rather new concepts in Germany, whether in the religious community or elsewhere. But there is change in the air.

Numerous projects outside the establishment have been started in recent years, such as Tarbut, Bet Deborah, Limmud and Moishe House. Some have petered out due to lack of funding.

The Bet Deborah conference for women rabbis, cantors and Jewish educators was initiated by activists in Berlin in 1998. It has since held several conferences, including two outside Germany.

Meshulash (triangle), a Berlin-based collective of artists started in 1991 after a rash of xenophobic incidents in Germany, was a forum for Jewish and non-Jewish artists and intellectuals from various countries (USA, Canada, France, Hungary, United Kingdom, Israel, Germany, the Czech Republic, Former Soviet Union). They organized numerous exhibits and happenings. Its combination of fine art and performance pushed the envelope of what was acceptable. The group is currently inactive.

Support is urgently needed for private initiatives, said one interviewee, who particularly recommends that the community back projects that promote inner-Jewish dialogue – such as Limmud and Tarbut. “And on the other hand, of course, we have to support Jewish-non-Jewish dialogue,” she said.

One cynical observer predicted that the Zentralrat would not use its increased funding to “set up an innovation fund to support social entrepreneurship.” Instead, they will hold more congresses, “talk more, have more panel discussions ...” You will only see change “when people just do things.”

4.8 Welfare: children and the elderly

In Germany, the Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland (ZWST) – founded in 1917 and rededicated in 1951 – is the umbrella organization for a broad range of social services

64 See: www.jubuk.org

to Jewish communities across Germany: clubs for seniors, with a special emphasis on Holocaust survivors and FSU immigrants; summer camps for children; programmes for teens and students; help for people with physical or mental handicaps; counselling services; training seminars; education on Jewish tradition and culture. The ZWST has a seminar centre in Bad Kissingen that hosts seminars on Jewish themes.⁶⁵

The ZWST belongs to the Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrt (BAGFW). Its tasks include:

- support for inclusive and professional social work;
- support for Jewish communities in Germany, expansion of infrastructure;
- strengthening Jewish identities;
- integration of Jewish immigrants from the Former Soviet Union;
- helping people help themselves;
- social policies and youth representation;
- targeted advice and support.

Its groups for Holocaust survivors and their families, which are located around the country, receive support from the Claims Conference, the “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future Fund” (“Future Fund” for short) and from Aktion Mensch.

The ZWST runs a Jewish spa hotel, called “Eden Park” in Bad Kissingen – a town with hot springs that was traditionally an attraction for German Jews. The kosher spa hotel provides a Jewish atmosphere for guests, with Sabbath and Jewish holiday services, lectures and tours on local Jewish history.

Many, but not all, Jewish communities have their own homes for the elderly.

In the focus group discussion, one participant noted that in her city, Potsdam, the community has done much good work with youth and seniors. “But what we are missing is an old age home. We

have some women who are single, completely alone and without any children. When their husbands die, they are left completely alone in a German old age home. And the women there ... are somehow avoided. They came to Germany at the age of seventy, did not learn German. It’s a pretty bad situation.”

4.9 Combating antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment

The end of the Second World War did not mean the end of antisemitism in Germany. Surveys and studies suggest that in Germany, as elsewhere in Europe, some twenty per cent of the population holds strongly antisemitic beliefs. These views have, over the decades, manifested themselves in numerous ways: through vandalism of Jewish property, religious institutions and cemeteries; through “secondary antisemitism” (such as blaming Jews for the Holocaust); through one-sided criticism or vilification of Israel; through Holocaust denial or relativization; attacks on Jewish traditions such as kosher slaughter and circumcision; and so on.

The so-called ‘new antisemitism,’ linked with vilification of Israel, is found in both the far-left and far-right of German mainstream society, as well as in Germany’s growing Muslim population. However, the majority of Germany’s estimated 4.3 million Muslims are of Turkish background and hold moderate political views. Muslim antisemitism is present in Germany but is more acute in some other European countries (such as France, Holland, Belgium and Sweden).

Calls for boycotts against Israeli products or academic exchange with Israel – common in the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe – do not find fertile ground in Germany.

However, alienation from Israel is increasingly common in the mainstream in Germany; a big change for a country for whom Israel was a popular tourism destination for decades; many non-Jewish Germans spent time volunteering on kibbutzim in the 1960s and 1970s; German-Israeli intermarriages were not uncommon. Today, it is much more common to see young people wearing Palestinian scarves, which are more a political statement than a fashion statement. One alternative youth club in Erfurt, in former East Germany, actually bans them.

65 See: www.zwst.org/de/zwst-ueber-uns/selbstdarstellung

Press coverage of Israel tends to be much milder in its criticism in Germany than elsewhere in Europe. Journalists working for newspapers under the Axel-Springer umbrella even pledge in their contracts to stand up for Israel's right to exist.

That said, the mainstream press tends to gravitate toward critical Israelis, who may express what some Germans feel they are "not allowed to say." In fact, the slogan "it must be permissible to criticize Israel" is a common complaint from those who are either unaware of, or who prefer to ignore, the fact that there is far more public criticism of Israel than praise.

In general, a public charge of antisemitism in Germany can damage or end a career. A few German-based Jewish initiatives, such as Sacha Stawski's "Honestly Concerned" media watchdog and Henryk Broder's acerbic blog, "Die Achse des Guten" (the Axis of Good), make it their business to publicize egregious cases of antisemitism, including Jews who take up extreme anti-Israel positions.

Organizations such as the Berlin-based Amadeu-Antonio Foundation⁶⁶ and the Kreuzberg Initiative Against Antisemitism⁶⁷ grapple with grass-roots antisemitism and xenophobia. There are countless small, grass-roots organizations, such as the Koordinierungsrat deutscher Nicht-Regierungsorganisationen gegen Antisemitismus e.V.⁶⁸ (Coordinating Council of German Non-governmental Organizations Against Antisemitism), that engage the public on related issues.

In 2004, Berlin's Foreign Ministry and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, hosted an international conference on antisemitism. Critics noted the conference failed to condemn its growth among Muslims in Europe, but participants nevertheless hailed the gathering as a success.

A resolution passed at the end of the two-day conference declared "unambiguously that international developments or political issues,

including those in Israel or elsewhere in the Middle East, never justify antisemitism."

Dubbed the "Berlin Resolution," it condemned all manifestations of antisemitism and other forms of discrimination based on ethnic origin or religious belief, as well as attacks on religious institutions motivated by such hatred.

Left Party legislator Petra Pau is largely responsible for the fact that for years, Germany has compiled statistics on antisemitic crimes; she has formally requested these reports as a member of parliament since her election in 1998. And she also has criticized those within her party who argue that Germany should be less supportive of Israel and more supportive of, for example, Hamas. The Left Party is generally seen as the weakest political link in Germany's general support for Israel, but other mainstream parties are sometimes seen as reluctant to censure members who express far-right views.

The Bundestag has held several debates and passed resolutions on combating antisemitism, and in 2009 the German Federal Ministry of the Interior convened a nine-member panel of experts to assess current challenges and best practices.

They issued their first report, "Antisemitism in Germany: Forms, conditions, prevention," in November 2011. Assessing existing reports and surveys, the commission concluded that about twenty per cent of the population holds strongly antisemitic views.

The report examined antisemitism not only in extreme right-wing, left-wing and Islamic extremist circles, but also in mainstream society. It found that while antisemitic crimes in Germany range from harassment to physical attacks, most incidents related to hate speech or materials (including on the Internet), Holocaust denial and attacks on Israel's right to exist, the latter coming largely from Iranian sources.

While German law bans Holocaust denial, as well as incitement to hate and repetition of Nazi propaganda, such material is spread swiftly from abroad via the Internet. German officials have urged American lawmakers to step in and ban such material in the German language emanating from web domains in the United States, but

66 See: www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de

67 See: www.kiga-berlin.org

68 See: www.koordinierungsrat-gegen-antisemitismus.org

American law – which protects the right to unpopular speech – leaves German critics and lawmakers frustrated.

In late 2012, attempts were made again to try to ban the extreme right-wing party, the National Democratic Party (NPD) of Germany. The Bundesrat, or legislative council, voted to apply to the Supreme Court to ban the 7,200-member party, which is known for its anti-democratic, anti-foreigner and antisemitic stances. However, Angela Merkel's cabinet declined to submit an application to ban the party after disagreements in the governing coalition prevented it from coming to a consensus.⁶⁹ Attempts to ban the party in 2003 had also failed, after the court learned that government informants themselves instigated some of the allegedly unconstitutional activities.

The NPD routinely belittles the Holocaust and blames foreigners for Germany's problems. The party has made it into two state parliaments in recent years by just scraping past the five per cent vote minimum. This earns the party federal taxpayer money.

Banning is not the answer; rather one must strengthen civic values, said one interviewee with roots in America. In Germany, "You don't ban [neo-Nazis] because they're just going to change their name and do something else under some other name."

One young respondent said that while stereotypes about Jews are common, she did not see any dramatic worsening of the situation in general: "There will always be those who have a problem with Jews," she said.

But she did see a link between tensions in the Middle East and levels of antisemitism. Critics of Israel often do not differentiate between Jews and Israel, and this plays out in personal confrontations, she noted: "I don't see any dramatic worsening of the situation. But what I am worried about – and we really have no influence on this – is that when there are tensions in the Middle East, this unfortunately has an immediate impact on Jews in Germany, because people often

think they're one and the same, Jews and Israelis. And they pressure Jews to express their opinions on foreign policy, wanting some kind of statement from them, in a way that they probably wouldn't do to others."

4.10 Israel education and advocacy

The relationship of unified Germany to Israel is complex, built upon decades of separate and profoundly different policies of East versus West Germany. The relationship of Jews in Germany to Israel has also undergone changes: as one observer noted, "the fresher our memories of the Holocaust, the stronger was our connection to Israel."

West Germany established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1965 (East Germany never did). West Germany, and today unified Germany, is amongst Israel's strongest supporters in Europe.

The Israeli Embassy's new headquarters in Berlin opened in 2001.

In addition to paying reparations to survivors in Israel and to the Jewish State,⁷⁰ Germany subsidizes the cost of such important military items for Israel as submarines that are capable of carrying missiles; in 2008, Chancellor Angela Merkel established an annual exchange between the cabinets of the two countries. It was the first time that Germany's ministers held an official meeting with their counterparts in a country outside Europe.

According to the L.A. Pincus study,⁷¹ most Jews in Germany have a feeling of solidarity with Israel and with their own country of origin in the FSU. Older respondents tended to have a stronger attachment to religious tradition and to Israel, while younger ones placed a greater emphasis on Jewish education. Across the age spectrum there was an appreciation of the political, cultural and economic stability of Germany.

69 See: www.spiegel.de/international/germany/press-review-german-cabinet-backs-off-attempt-to-ban-far-right-npd-a-889671.html, 19 March 2013.

70 An estimated twenty-five billion euros had been paid by 2007 (see: Belkin, P. "Germany's Relations with Israel: Background and Implications for German Middle East Policy," in: CRS Report for Congress (order code RL33808), January 19, 2007, p. 5. Available to download from: www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33808.pdf).

71 See: Ben-Rafael, E., Glöckner, O. and Sternberg, Y. (2011). *Jews and Jewish Education in Germany Today* Boston and Leiden: Brill, p.4.

As one interviewee noted, “before the 1990s, Israel was much more central; it was still common to say that we were sitting on packed suitcases. In the 1980s, Germany was not the first-choice homeland for the Jews who lived here. Rather, Israel came before Germany. And back then, the identification with Israel was also stronger.” Today, “the identification with Israel is not quite as strong as it was for the older generation.”

Education about Israel remains strong in Jewish schools. Both the State of Israel and the Hebrew language are standard subjects in the classroom, noted one interviewee, herself an educator: “Our colleagues who teach Jewish subjects at school are all from Israel, and speak Hebrew as their mother tongue. There is no Judaism without Israel and without Hebrew. Of course, Israel is always part of the programme ... [but] we don’t do any PR work for Israel.”

Outreach to non-Jews remains a priority for the Israeli Embassy and for such interfaith organizations as the German-Israel Society. Some German state schools have twinning programmes with Israeli towns or cities and other projects specifically directed at building connections between younger generations of non-Jewish Germans and Israelis.

Private organizations such as the Bertelsmann Foundation Young Leaders Exchange bring Israelis, Palestinians and Germans together in both Germany and Israel.

Israel advocacy among Jews is transmitted through the Birthright (Taglit) programme, which brings Jews between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six to Israel. In Germany, these sponsored trips were introduced in 2001 and are coordinated by the Central Council and the ZWST. Since its start, they have brought 4,010 youth from Germany to Israel; 462 in 2012 alone.⁷²

One of the most impressive umbrella programmes is ConAct⁷³ (“Working Together”), which annually supports 300 extra-curricular exchange programmes between pupils and students in Israel and Germany. Some 7,000 participants aged between twelve and twenty-seven take part

annually. The first exchange programmes were in the 1950s, even before diplomatic relations were officially established between Israel and West Germany. ConAct was established in 2001 as a coordinating body. It is headquartered in Lutherstadt Wittenberg, in the former East German state of Saxony Anhalt. Since 2004, the number of programmes it coordinates has nearly doubled. Many involve home hospitality – youth from Germany getting to know about life in Israel from the bottom up. ConAct is an institute of the German Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth, and is supported by the states of Saxony Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

An important contributor to the identification of Jewish youth with Israel is Makkabi, the Jewish sports association, which has thirty-seven local branches and about 4,000 members. It is supported by the Central Council. The highest goal for members is participation in the Maccabiah games, akin to a Jewish Olympics, held every four years in Israel.⁷⁴

The Makkabi Association Germany was established in 1898 and relaunched in 1965. It is part of the German Sport Association and German Olympic Sport Association, and is the only Jewish sport association in Germany.

In 2012, the socialist-Zionist youth movement Hashomer Hatzair,⁷⁵ linked to the kibbutz movement, inaugurated its first post-war club in Germany. Other Zionist programmes for youth include the Frankfurt-based Zionistische Jugend in Deutschland e.V.;⁷⁶ as well as youth clubs in Hanover and Baden.

Aliyah (emigration to Israel), and Israelis moving to Germany

Very few Jews migrate to Israel from Germany these days (about 120 per year in the last several years).⁷⁷ However, many immigrants from the FSU have family in Israel and visit regularly, although as one interviewee put it, their “identification with Israel is not as strong as among the post-war established community. Overall support for Israel is very strong, with Jewish schools emphasizing the

72 See www.zwst.org/de/taglit

73 See: www.conact-org.de

74 See: www.makkabi.com

75 See: www.hashomer.de

76 See: www.zjd-habonim.de

77 See: www.jewishagency.org/JewishAgency/English/About/Press+Room/Aliyah+Statistics/nov2010.htm

centrality of Israel historically and currently, many parents send their kids for holidays there, and increasing numbers of youth participate in Taglit, or 'Birthright.' The 'Israel Day' activities are very popular in Jewish communities ...” Yet according to one respondent, many Jews in Germany also feel uncomfortable about Israeli politics, and thus keep their distance from public demonstrations of solidarity: “There are two sides to the coin. First of all, most of our new immigrants have relatives in Israel. Of the children in our Jewish primary school in Berlin, probably a fifth or even one third go to Israel on holiday, visiting relatives ... The political situation definitely makes the situation difficult, and Israel advocacy work – you see it at pro-Israel demonstrations – attracts very few members of the community. There’s a hesitancy. It’s a difficult story.” Anecdotally, it seems that any such hesitancy is related to feelings of fear that such demonstrations of solidarity might be targeted by antisemitic or anti-Israel groups, even though security is typically very strong.

But Jews should not feel guilty about not moving to Israel themselves, said one respondent, who noted that Berlin Jewish leaders had told Israeli President Shimon Peres, on his last visit to Germany (2010) that: “we are interested in what’s going on in Israel, but we live here and that’s completely ok.”

Indeed, today, it is more common to see Israelis moving to Germany, rather than Jews moving from Germany to Israel.

While no statistics are available, some claim that there may be 20,000 Israelis living in Berlin currently. Many choose Berlin because it is arguably Europe’s “hippest” capital, a haven for alternative lifestyles, a magnet for artists, musicians and writers.

But they also come to Germany because it is relatively easy for them to obtain a second passport if they have a parent or grandparent who was persecuted by the Nazis.

Some 100,000 Israelis currently hold a German passport, according to a report which was published by Israeli sociologist Sima Zalcborg⁷⁸

78 See: <http://en.trend.az/regions/world/europe/1884235.html>

in the spring of 2011 in Israel’s *Eretz Acheret* magazine. About 7,000 people per year apply for citizenship at the German Embassy in Tel Aviv.

Their presence generates a whole new cultural scene in Berlin: there are regular gatherings of Israelis in Berlin, a website started by an Israeli expatriate and a weekly radio show – *Kol Berlin* – which is conducted by its host Aviv Russ in both German and Hebrew. A project supported by the Israeli Embassy – *Habitat* – organizes Israeli-themed events that cater for homesick Israelis as well as for non-Jewish Israelophiles.

There is some disappointment on the part of local Jewish leaders who wish Israelis would become more involved in the Jewish community.

“They said, ‘We don’t want to join the community,’ and I said, ‘That’s OK. We have various activities that might be of interest once in a while,’” said one interviewee. “They are Israelis first, and then Jews. They like to go to the synagogue, but not for religious reasons.”

Israel advocacy

Despite the fact that *aliyah* and turnout at pro-Israel demonstrations are both reportedly low, Israel advocacy continues apace, mostly organized by a few tireless Jewish activists, and usually with support from the Israeli Embassy, the Central Council and local Jewish communities. “Many new activities have emerged in the field of education about Israel or public relations for Israel within the Jewish community,” noted an interviewee. “First and foremost is ILI, ‘I like Israel,’ a club that originated in Munich but is now active all over Germany, through its promotion of ‘Israel Day’ events and its creation of the annual ‘Israel Congress.’ The Israel Day events were well received in the communities. There is a lot of active work to bring Israel into the centre of attention.”

The Frankfurt-based media watchdog organization Honestly Concerned⁷⁹ was started in 2002 by Sacha Stawski in response to a rise in anti-Israel and anti-Jewish reportage and statements by politicians and public figures in Germany and Europe. Stawski puts out a regular newsletter with frequent updates, aiming to raise awareness about antisemitism and xenophobia.

79 See: <http://honestlyconcerned.info>

ILI was founded in 2003 with the aim to fight anti-Israel sentiments through education and events.⁸⁰ Also directed by Stawski today, it co-sponsors annual “Israel Day” events across Germany, the above-mentioned annual Israel Congress, which draws hundreds of participants, and educational forums linking pro-Israel organizations in German-speaking countries.

Non-Jews have also become active, particularly in relation to Iran’s verbal threats against Israel. Two non-denominational, non-partisan organizations – Stop the Bomb (founded in 2007 in Austria and 2008 in Germany) and the Germany-based Scholars for Peace in the Middle East – focus primarily on this threat to Israel, organizing conferences and demonstrations, and pressuring the German government to adhere to stricter economic sanctions against the Islamic regime.⁸¹

There are dissenting positions on Israel within the Jewish community, both in the mainstream and on the fringes. Two prominent individuals in

Germany – Rabbi Tovia Ben Chorin and Professor Micha Brumlik – have become active in “J-Call,”⁸² the France-based, alternative pro-Israel movement that is modelled on the American-based J-Street.

In addition, there are some very small, left-wing Jewish groups such as “Jüdische Stimme für gerechten Frieden in Nahost” [Jewish Voices for a Just Peace in the Middle East] that publicly demonstrate against Israeli policies and against Germany’s strong support for the Jewish State.⁸³ These groups and their members are frequent targets of pro-Israel bloggers and activists.

Whether they are interested in politics or not, some maintain that Jews in Germany are increasingly treated by antisemites as spokespersons for the Jewish State. As one respondent put it, “Jews in the Diaspora are always held responsible, and they often have points of view, but they don’t have any real influence on anything. And neither are they responsible for the results of the policies of Israel and its neighbours.”

80 See: www.i-like-israel.de

81 See: <http://de.stopthebomb.net>

82 See: www.jcall.eu

83 See: www.juedische-stimme.de/

5 Summary

The tremendous population growth in the early 1990s brought a kind of euphoria about the return of Jews to Germany. Some Jewish leaders, including Michel Friedman, former vice president of the Central Council, were guardedly optimistic, noting that if even only ten per cent of the newly arrived immigrants became active Jews in some way, this would be a boon.

Today, many of those Jews who were scattered throughout the country as part of the “contingency” programme have moved to bigger cities. The younger generation, especially those born since the “Wende,” (the “Turning Point” in 1989-1990) are moving in droves to Berlin. And the older generation is dying out. Over the next generation, community membership is bound to drop significantly, observers note.

As one interviewee put it, the Jewish population “will be more than it was in 1990, a lot more. It’ll be a lot richer and a lot more diverse and a lot more active but it’s not going to be a hundred and twenty thousand people. Instead of a declining and dying community of twenty thousand, twenty five thousand, it’ll be a viable pluralistic diverse community of fifty thousand, sixty thousand.”

It is a matter of interpretation as to whether the future looks bright. Smaller cities are seeing their “new” Jewish communities dwindling. But there is definitely a much livelier, more diverse and “in-your-face” Jewish life in Germany’s major population centres today than in 1989.

“Everyone says it now ... that we will end up with ten communities probably ... and a lot of the communities will disappear,” said one respondent. “So I’m kind of certain that there will be Jewish life in this country and it will be a solid Jewish life in this country but I do not share this faceless optimism and enthusiasm, which is mostly politically motivated, about the growth and flourishing and the most vibrant Jewish community in Europe. I don’t see this.”

Yet he also reflects the view of Friedman, that there is definitely change for the better. “Well, there’s certainly not a decline ... in terms of a vision that we have of the richness and diversity.

I wouldn’t say there is growth in all different dimensions but I do see dynamism.”

The interviews reflect the two sides of the coin – there are both challenges and benefits to this historic immigration. And, as several interviewees said, this is a process whose outcome is unknown.

“We’re definitely very much in the middle of this story,” said one. “Simply put, the story is that until 1990 there was a ... structural, political, religious, conceptual approach [that] was necessary for a viable [community], for a certain sociological and demographic reality. And then everything changed.”

“The Central Council is attempting to manage a transition to a religious pluralism ... the doors need to be opened both ways” – to Progressive as well as traditional Judaism – he continued. It is possible “to live today as a fully observant Orthodox Jew in Germany, period, no excuse. If you don’t want to, that’s fine; it’s a free world, of course. But don’t [say you can’t] do it because it’s not possible.”

Pluralism and “who is a Jew?”

One of the biggest challenges currently facing the community is the issue of “who is a Jew?” The FSU immigration brought many people to this country who are not halachically Jewish, but who identify strongly as Jews nevertheless. Many Jewish leaders are confronted with questions about when, how and under which circumstances young people will be able to be a part of the official Jewish community.

One person in the focus group said, “My mother is not Jewish, so that means I am not a Jew if you ask the orthodox mainstream in Germany. And today they are also pressuring the Progressive Jews to drop the idea of patrilineal descent. That is the first problem for me.”

“The second problem is that I am not religious, and can’t pretend to be ... so the Jewish community is no place for me. See? But still, I consider myself Jewish, not solely in the sense of a totality, but it is a part of me, and I don’t know what to do with this.”

Another added: “My mother is also not Jewish, and in the Soviet Union of course I was considered a Jewish woman, and I had to endure all the usual insults. This was part of my life. But also my father’s big Jewish family: that was part of my life. The jokes, and the conflicts ... Then I decided to convert ... and the first life cycle event of my son was the circumcision.”

In order to solve the problem of Jewish identity, “all the Jewish denominations in Germany have to engage in a profound discussion about their self-definitions and goals for the future,” one interviewee said. “If this problem isn’t solved in the near future, Germany’s Jews will continue to shrink by losing more potential members.”

She considered it high time that non-halachic Jews were welcomed under the umbrella of the *Einheitsgemeinde*, even if they would not be accepted in all synagogue communities: “By welcoming all Jews, also non-halachic ones, to connect or re-connect with their Judaism in their own manner, they would answer the highly-debated question of who is a Jew in a positive way.”

She suggested forming a committee “of experts and laypersons from all denominations and also post- and trans-denominational organizations. As I assume, it will be a big challenge to find one definition, satisfying all involved parties The *Einheitsgemeinde* has to open up towards a heterogeneous, pluralistic definition of who is a Jew.”

As a model she suggested the American version of the Jewish Community Centre (JCC), and said that representatives of JCCs from America should meet with German Jewish leaders to discuss possible models. The Jewish future in Germany depends on it, she says.

Structure of communities

Several interviewees said a new structure for Jewish communities is needed: “One of the biggest challenges is finding ways to make sure that [this structure] evolves and that there’s an evolution, rather than a revolution,” one interviewee said.

But one should try to prevent the community from fragmenting to the extent that “there is no more Jewish community, but rather only a liberal Jewish community, an orthodox Jewish community and

a Sephardi Jewish community,” one interviewee said, lest it “resemble today’s Muslim community in Germany, completely fragmented ... [otherwise] it will reach the point where you pick your synagogue like a consumer – only liberal, or only orthodox – and you only feel like a member in the way that a football team fan feels. And this is a mistake.”

Educational materials

There is a real need for more educational materials, one commentator said. “We still don’t have any proper teaching materials for religious education; I see this as a huge shortcoming that this hasn’t been taken care of yet It is crucial: We have nearly missed this great window of opportunity brought to us by the immigration. People have come, they needed the Jewish community in order to be allowed in, and we have only partially succeeded in keeping them in the community.”

Bridging gaps

Better communication is needed between the generations and between German-speaking and Russian-speaking Jews, said one interviewee. We need to “make elderly, non-religious Jews feel at home, both in Germany and in the Jewish community. [We need to] bridge communication gaps between German and Russian speakers, both mentally and linguistically and in terms of their social position in this society.”

Continuity and leadership skills

Some interviewees specifically urged that more be done to help young Jews in Germany to meet socially, hence to marry and start families. Indeed, all Jewish institutions and foundations agree that one of the greatest challenges facing the German Jewish community today is the need to involve young Jews more effectively in Jewish community life.

But lack of continuity in the Jewish community is not the fault of intermarriage, said one interviewee. “Rather, it is due to the fact that the Jewish community has failed to make Judaism relevant for these people. And that’s exactly why a contemporary, relevant interpretation of Judaism is essential.”

Interviewees from secular, Reform and Orthodox standpoints agreed on this – that Jewish life must be about action, and not only in synagogues.

Action requires leadership. Thus leadership skills must be cultivated. The main challenges are the “stupidity, traumas and psychological complexes of the leadership and membership ... lack of professionalism and inability to draft and communicate a vision for this community that will captivate the base and will offer a road map for action.”

Conclusion

These challenges, and the myriad suggestions presented, are a sign of vitality in Germany’s Jewish community today. Many saw – and acted upon – the proverbial writing on the wall – that changes in geopolitics could result in a Jewish boom in Germany. Even the late Chabad leader, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who had steered his *schlichim* (emissaries) clear of Germany, changed his tune in the late 1980s.

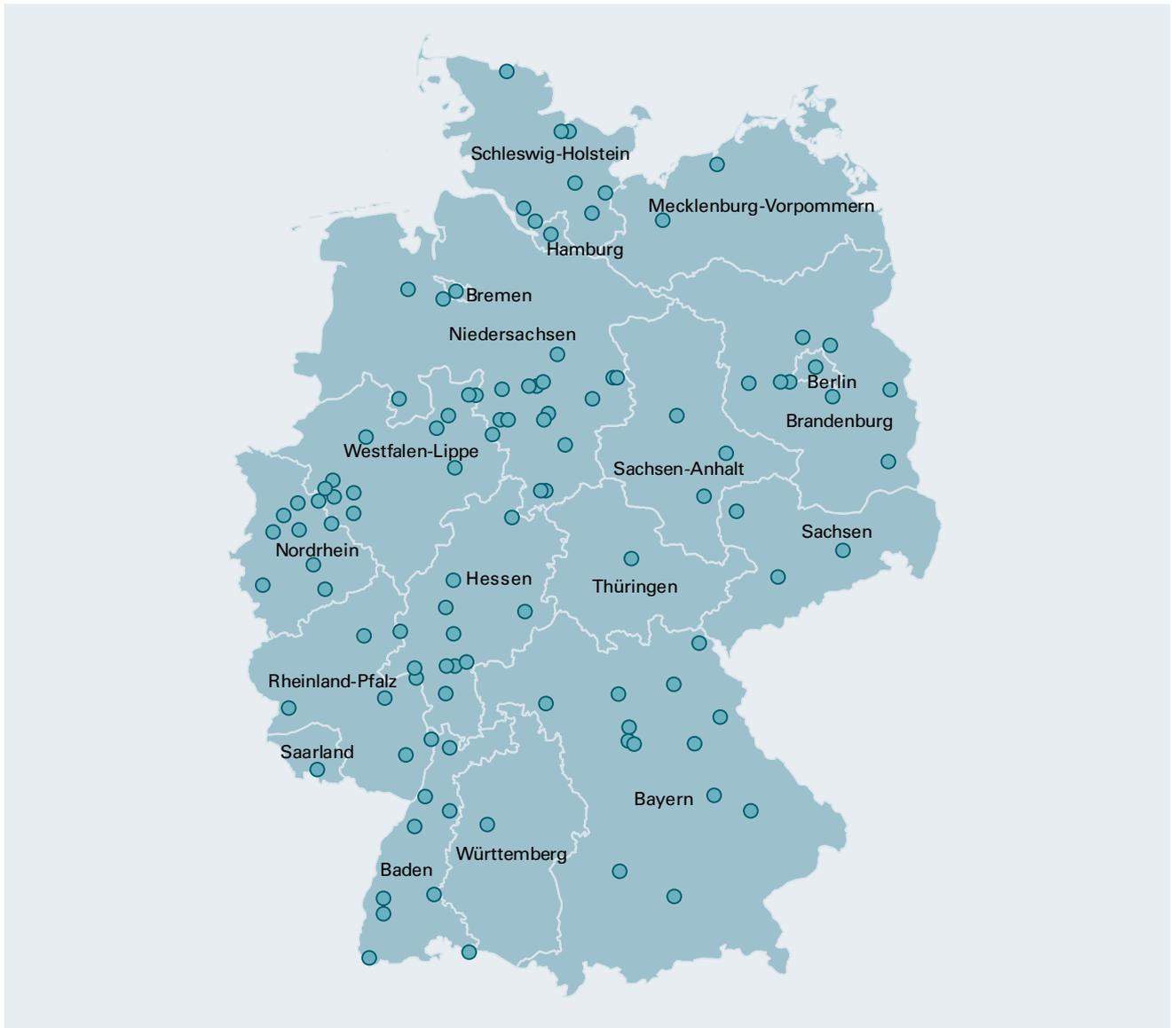
Today’s situation results both from these geopolitical developments and from Germany’s

post-war connection with Jews and Israel – that “special relationship,” with all its complications, its facets. It is an uncomfortable juxtaposition of vitality and objectification. Yes, Jews in Germany are “useful” commodities in terms of Germany’s acceptance by “the West.” But arguably no other society has gone so far, done so much, to recognize, atone and make reparations for its crimes against humanity. And unquestionably, there is great potential for Jewish life in Germany again. These facts deserve acknowledgement, even if it is fair at times to be cynical, and even though forgetting the past is out of the question.

As one interviewee who came from the FSU in the early 1990s put it, she “never would have predicted” that she would feel comfortable here. “Because one had other associations with Germany ... You would never think that we’d all accomplish so much.”

Appendix A

Map of officially organized Jewish religious communities in Germany today⁸⁴



84 <http://www.zentralratjuden.de/de/topic/5.html>

Appendix B

Membership statistics 1990-2012⁸⁵

Incoming and outgoing members between 1990-2012															
Year	Total Membership 01.01.	Incoming members						Outgoing members						Total Membership 31. 12. ...	
		Former Soviet Union	Arrival from abroad	Arrival from other Jewish communities in Germany	Conversions	Births	Other additions	Total additions	Emigration	Switch to other communities in Germany	Departure from community	Deaths Losses	Other Loss		Total Loss
1990	27,711	1,008	62	247	62	109	898	2,386	202	206	63	431	106	1,008	29,089
1991	29,089	5,198	93	460	41	121	159	6,072	359	365	73	444	228	1,469	33,692
1992	33,692	3,777	80	293	64	148	190	4,552	221	396	63	460	300	1,440	36,804
1993	36,804	5,205	112	285	58	117	406	6,183	381	566	85	555	483	2,070	40,917
1994	40,917	5,521	108	391	77	119	529	6,745	285	709	112	576	421	2,103	45,559
1995	45,559	8,851	228	497	34	104	450	10,164	206	609	168	501	442	1,926	53,797
1996	53,797	8,608	158	614	49	139	683	10,251	230	740	130	615	1,130	2,845	61,203
1997	61,203	7,092	212	640	40	99	396	8,479	283	955	203	608	162	2,211	67,471
1998	67,471	8,299	180	696	28	123	286	9,612	209	997	263	782	543	2,794	74,289
1999	74,289	8,929	223	817	77	147	619	10,812	254	1,176	355	862	715	3,362	81,739
2000	81,739	7,366	126	864	74	147	338	8,915	239	1,232	333	934	160	2,898	87,756
2001	87,756	7,152	199	675	73	117	345	8,561	206	1,241	329	990	225	2,991	93,326
2002	93,326	6,597	203	596	47	151	553	8,147	205	1,160	397	1,000	376	3,138	98,335
2003	98,335	6,216	258	745	74	164	413	7,870	226	1,211	406	1,185	705	3,733	102,472
2004	102,472	4,757	202	791	79	139	322	6,290	148	1,058	408	1,095	320	3,029	105,733
2005	105,733	3,124	256	496	61	128	1,336	5,401	227	924	308	1,178	820	3,457	107,677
2006	107,677	1,971	229	701	46	205	2,539	5,691	282	2,411	1,084	1,302	495	5,574	107,794
2007	107,794	1,296	202	551	48	168	425	2,690	251	893	575	1,051	384	3,154	107,330
2008	107,330	862	134	504	45	171	565	2,281	379	870	433	1,038	456	3,176	106,435
2009	106,435	704	216	473	50	183	398	2,024	189	681	403	1,137	1,808	4,218	104,241
2010	104,241	667	354	435	81	168	540	2,245	141	642	423	1,081	175	2,462	104,024
2011	104,024	636	177	413	79	212	382	1,899	233	701	449	1,195	548	3,126	102,797
2012	102,797	481	461	563	79	199	444	2,227	256	784	404	1,282	163	2,889	102,135
Additions / losses	Total 1990	Total						Total						Total	Total 2012
1990-2012	27,711	104,317	4,473	12,747	1,366	3,378	13,216	139,497	5,612	20,527	7,467	20,302	11,165	65,073	102,135

85 Current statistics on members of Jewish communities can be downloaded from the website of the ZWST, here: <http://zwst.org/de/service/mitgliederstatistik/>

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

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