

Foreword

This report on contemporary Hungarian Jewry, which comes on the sixtieth anniversary of the Holocaust in Hungary, represents both a continuation of and a new phase in the work of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) on diaspora Jewish communities. Although JPR's most recent work in its Planning for Jewish Communities programme has concentrated on the United Kingdom, particularly the Long-term Planning for the British Jewish Community (LTP) project, it has taken, and continues to take, a keen interest in Jewish communities abroad, especially those outside North America. Over the past decade, JPR has published the results of a survey of Jews in the 'new' South Africa, essays on new Jewish identities and the politics of cultural revival among Jews in Europe, a pilot study on European Jewish cultural production and consumption, as well as short works on the development of Jewish museums in Europe.

In addition to its policy reports, JPR produces an academic journal, *Patterns of Prejudice* (published by Routledge), many of whose articles deal with aspects of prejudice and xenophobia in Europe in the present and in the recent past. JPR also maintains a website called *Antisemitism and Xenophobia Today* (www.axt.org.uk) that monitors hatred, xenophobia and prejudice across Europe and provides links to other websites that deal with similar issues. JPR also organizes public lectures, seminars and conferences on related issues and its staff participates in parallel meetings throughout Europe.

In light of all this activity, the current report should not be viewed in isolation; it forms part of a continuing programme of work in which JPR has been engaged since its inception as an international think-tank. Moreover, there has been a rebirth of new European Jewish identities that differ from those in Israel and North America in several important ways, and indeed differ considerably from older European Jewish identities. This and a discernible rise in levels of antisemitism in many European states reinforce JPR's intention in the medium term to lead the way in policy research for Jewish communities in Europe.

The present report discusses the results of a sample survey of contemporary Hungarian Jewry conducted by the Institute for Minority Studies at Loránd

Eötvös University in Budapest. The research was initiated and directed by Professor András Kovács and carried out by a research group (Róbert Angelusz, János Ladányi and Róbert Tardos). The study examined a wide variety of demographic, social and cultural issues, including Jewish identity and practices, as well as respondents' ideological, social and economic attitudes.

Understanding generational changes in the social position of Hungarian Jews was among the survey's main research goals, as was determining the current social and economic position of Jews within Hungarian society. Monitoring the attitudes of contemporary Hungarian Jews concerning their own Jewish origins, as well as Jews and Judaism in general, constituted another goal. Yet another objective was to ascertain the extent to which Hungary's Jews involve themselves in organized Jewish community life. Finally, the survey aimed to look at how Hungarian Jewry views antisemitism and its own relations with the non-Jewish population as well as attitudes towards Israel and the impact of the Holocaust.

The results of the survey have already been published in Hungary.¹ The English version published here has been edited, mainly by adding background information to make the findings more comprehensible and relevant to a wider, non-Hungarian, readership.

For some people who take an interest in Jewish communities, there appears to be a fixation with numbers. How many Jews are there? Or how many 'real' Jews are there? These are questions that are at best difficult, and usually impossible, to answer for a multiplicity of reasons. Are people Jewish only on the basis of their religious beliefs or practices? Or are they less Jewish if the extent of their observance of Jewish customs and traditions is minimal and their religious beliefs nil, even though their parents and all

¹ The report was published in Hungarian as András Kovács (ed.), *Zsidók és zsidóság a mai Magyarországon. Egy szociológiai kutatás eredményei* (Jews and Jewry in Contemporary Hungary. Results of a Sociological Survey) (Budapest: Szombat 2002). In addition, several thematic analyses by five authors were published in András Kovács (ed.), *Zsidók és zsidóság a mai Magyarországon* (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő 2003).

2 Planning for Jewish communities

four grandparents were Jewish? Can people be Jewish today simply because they are married to a Jewish person and follow Jewish custom? Do people cease to be Jewish when they lose contact with Jewish institutions and with other Jewish people? Can people be Jews just because they consider or *feel* themselves to be Jewish? In one form or another, questions such as these concern every Jewish community in the modern world and they are particularly pertinent with regard to the Jews of Hungary.

Even before the Nazis' decimation of Hungarian Jewry outside Budapest and the ghettoization of the Jews of Budapest in 1944, concerns over identity such as these were to the fore. The issues of deviation from religious orthodoxy and assimilation were familiar long before the Nazi invasion and the Communist takeover that succeeded it. The British historical geographer Tim Cole, in his account of the making of the Jewish ghetto in Budapest in the spring and summer of 1944, notes that the issue of exterminating the 'Jew' was preceded by the need to define who was and was not a 'Jew', and that

the problematic and contested nature of defining the 'Jew' came in particular because such definition involved an attempt to draw (imaginary) boundaries between the 'Jew' and the 'non-Jew' in Hungary.²

Cole notes that, while the word 'Jew' was used unambiguously in the so-called First Anti-Jewish Law of 1938, there was no attempt at a systematic definition of who the 'Jew' was, the legislation assuming that the 'Jew' was a member of the 'Israelite faith'. Drawing boundaries between 'Jews' and 'non-Jews' involved the implementation of a series of categories of Jews who were exempt under the legislation: converts to Christianity and those who had distinguished themselves in military service during the Great War. Further legislation in the following year went on to include as 'Jews' people with at least one parent or two grandparents of the

'Israelite faith'. This law also broadened the definition of those exempted from having to be 'Jewish' to include people who had distinguished themselves in the political, academic, religious (Christian) and sporting arenas. Further legislation in 1941 was more explicit in the determination of 'Jewishness' by grandparentage in that it specified the grandparent's status at birth.

All of these laws were of practical significance when, in 1944, decisions were taken to create Jewish areas in Budapest, not in the form of a ghetto that concentrated all the city's 'Jews' geographically into a single area but by designating specific buildings in specific streets in specific parts of the city as being either 'Jewish' or 'non-Jewish'. This was enacted by means of large population exchanges within the city. There are serious and problematic implications of these historical events for Jews in contemporary Hungary. For instance, when some researchers state that there are confused Jewish identities in modern Hungary or that the degree of Jewishness and Jewish identity can be determined on the basis of the origin of parents and grandparents, it is important to realize that these considerations are not latter-day sociological inventions. They are rooted in both past and present realities in which the divide between 'Jew' and 'non-Jew' is not a solid wall but one that is riddled with holes and gaps, if it exists at all.

There are practical implications, too. As Leonard Mars notes, to identify oneself publicly as a Jew in Hungary today may lead, paradoxically, to being granted access to educational resources from abroad, so that people with 'Jewish family connections' now seek admission to Jewish schools because of a perception of better educational opportunities.³ Being 'Jewish' can offer other benefits as well, such as, for older people, a supplement to the state pension or sheltered accommodation. And what goes for Hungary goes for many other countries in East and Central Europe and that, in turn, is what makes this report so interesting, relevant and timely.

*Stanley Waterman
Director of Research
Institute for Jewish Policy Research*

2 Tim Cole, *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto* (New York: Routledge 2003).

3 Leonard Mars, 'Cultural aid and Jewish identity in post-Communist Hungary', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2000, 85–96 (89). Mars's conclusions are based on a small number of interviews and may be difficult to substantiate. Moreover, state compensation is only one of several schemes directed at members of various minority groups.