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## Multi Year Work Plan “Killing Sites” Report

based on the findings of the conference  
“Killing Sites – Research and Remembrance”,  
January 22-23, 2014,  
Pedagogical University Krakow

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## Abstract “Killing Sites”

The conference “Killing Sites – Research and Remembrance” marked the successful completion of the first stage of IHRA’s Multi Year Work Plan on “Killing Sites”. Many organisations and individuals were invited by the Steering Committee and met in January 2014 at the Pedagogical University of Krakow to present and discuss their ongoing work in the field. The overwhelmingly positive resonance from the participants reflects the conference’s timeliness and importance. The MYWP “Killing Sites” can be regarded as a flagship project of IHRA. Based on the findings of the conference, the Steering Committee is pleased to present its report and propose a number of recommendations that we believe are crucial to facilitating further progress in the field. Six of these recommendations require immediate action and funding from IHRA:

1. Publishing an edited volume that will include the conference lectures and presentations, resulting in the first relatively comprehensive and up-to-date anthology on the current state of research and fieldwork on this topic.
2. Creating a constantly growing database on “Killing Sites” featuring information, contacts and links.
3. Implementing follow up conferences on a bi- or triennial basis, as well as regular round table discussions and workshops for people working in the field.
4. Employing an assistant who will create, update and maintain the database and act as a contact person between the IHRA/SC and the organisations and experts working in the field.
5. Making “Killing Sites” an inherent part of the Grant Program.
6. Preparing an exhibition about “Killing Sites” to be distributed in IHRA-member countries that will be adapted to specific regional contexts and translated into local languages.

## About the Conference

Experts estimate that more than a third of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust as well as other groups of victims were murdered by shootings. The perpetrators - mobile killing units consisting of Einsatzgruppen, police battalions, Wehrmacht, collaborators or a combination of the aforementioned – obliterated entire communities in a few days or even mere hours. Still, the sites where these atrocities were committed were often neglected for decades. In

order to ensure that the murder of millions is remembered, IHRA identified “Killing Sites” as a priority and held its first conference on this subject on January 22-23, 2014 in Krakow.

The invited organisations that were present in Krakow are highly disparate and their backgrounds, approaches, regional interests and goals vary. Nevertheless they all voiced one common interest: to save the “Killing Sites” from being forgotten, to wrest the so far unidentified victims from oblivion and to restore their dignity. Nowadays it has become a race against time as in a few years no eyewitnesses will be left and documents detailing the events are often scarce. In the near future no one will be able to recount what had happened and to remember those who perished.

Given these facts, scientific fields that are new to Holocaust researchers are gaining importance. In the aftermath of the so called Yugoslav Wars forensic investigations developed technical means to research and analyze large scale murder sites, which in turn sparked new interest in sites of the Holocaust. Utilizing non-invasive approaches from forensic archaeology can provide new evidence and offer insight into the “Killing Sites” while at the same time respecting religious and political sensitivities.

Yet the current condition of many “Killing Sites” prevents them from being recognized as such by passersby and visitors alike. As the sites’ significance is not always self-evident, further information and explanation is needed. Internet based databases and mapping initiatives can cater to that need by raising awareness, directing to the actual sites and contextualizing them. Currently only a few educational programs focusing on “Killing Sites” seem to exist, even though the topic is sometimes featured in the national curricula, but according to the findings of the conference additional programs are being developed in joint efforts by international and local experts.

An integral part of the conference was to enable a comparative view on different national and regional contexts. These shared perspectives highlighted the manifold approaches, strategies and experiences of those working in the field. Due to the fact that most “Killing Sites” were located in Eastern Europe, the conference placed a strong focus on this area. The situation in Ukraine was a major focus covered by many contributors, as the majority of killings took place on former (or nowadays) Ukrainian soil. In addition numerous organisations initiated their work in Ukraine. But the perceptions from experts involved in

Poland, Latvia, and Romania proved equally valuable, since they emphasized similarities as well as differences on the level of international and local cooperation. Commemorative activities and practices are often particularly bound to very different regional and national contexts of remembrance. In addition, jurisdiction regarding burial, commemoration and conservation issues does vary between countries. In the ensuing discussions at the conference some attendees advocated a trans-European law while others did not endorse its necessity. Instead they would prefer that existing regional laws be properly implemented or enforced.

Still preservation and memorialization of “Killing Sites” should not only be limited by the country’s legislation. Since most sites include predominantly Jewish victims, the sites’ preservation and maintenance should also respect Jewish religious laws (Halakha). One of the basic halakhic principles is that once a body is buried it should no longer be disturbed or moved. Thus, exhumation is considered a violation of Jewish law and tradition and should be avoided. In order to prevent misconceptions and discord when dealing with “Killing Sites” it is essential to explain such matters in an understandable manner. Such dialogues at eye level have in the past often ensured local support for the sites, because people can relate to the fact that the deceased should be respected and their memory honoured, which is a common element in most religions.

All in all the multifaceted approach of the conference that included scholarly and practical projects prepared a solid foundation on which to build future cooperation and activities. In its function as an intergovernmental body IHRA can serve as a prospective neutral platform facilitating contacts between organisations. By sharing information on funding options, new scientific approaches, current activities in the field, or best-practice models IHRA can assist many organisations to spare their limited resources and capacities. Using its political influence IHRA can help smaller and regional projects overcome obstacles by enhancing access to political leaders and state archives. Furthermore as an alliance that represents 31 member countries IHRA possesses the means to raise public awareness for “Killing Sites” in general and foster long-term commitments. It can urge its member countries to make “Killing Sites” a vital part of their agenda and bring international attention to less known “Killing Sites” hence adding value and meaning to otherwise long forgotten and neglected sites.

### **The Steering Committee “Killing Sites”:**

The Steering Committee includes Dr. Thomas Lutz (Topography of Terror Foundation, Berlin), Dr. David Silberklang (Yad Vashem, Jerusalem), Dr. Piotr Trojański (Institute of History, Pedagogical University of Krakow), Dr. Juliane Wetzel (Center for Research on Antisemitism, TU Berlin) Steering Committee Chair. A previous member, Dr. Luc Levy (Mémorial de la Shoah), left the Steering Committee (and the IHRA) in 2013. The members were supported by three externs: Dr. Miriam Bistrovic who acted as the project’s coordinator, Florian Kimmelmeier who worked on compiling the report and Renata Łuczyńska who oversaw the conference preparations.

## Introduction

Among the Jewish victims of the Holocaust approximately 2 to 2.2 million – more than a third – were killed by shootings. Yet, the places where these shootings occurred, most of them located in Eastern Europe, were neglected for decades. While official commemoration ceremonies, public remembrance and scholarly work have often focused on extermination camps, concentration camps, death marches and ghettos, only a few included “Killing Sites” at the centre of public attention.<sup>1</sup> IHRA’s major purpose is to encourage political and social leaders to support Holocaust education, remembrance and research – both nationally and internationally. In order to ensure that the murder of millions is remembered IHRA identified “Killing Sites” as a priority in this Multi Year Work Plan, setting out for a long-term commitment in this field. The conference “Killing Sites – Research and Remembrance,” held January 22-23, 2014 in Krakow, was the successful completion of the first stage of this flagship project of IHRA.

Amidst the gruesome facts of the Holocaust the “Killing Sites” stand out for various reasons: the shootings did not happen in secrecy behind closed doors, but were perpetrated in the vicinity of smaller settlements and cities. Entire Jewish communities that had thrived for centuries and whose members played a major part in the local town’s social, cultural and economic life were destroyed in merely a few days or even hours, the victims’ bodies thrown in mass graves or pits. The perpetrators were Einsatzgruppen or other SS mobile killing units, police battalions, the Wehrmacht, local collaborators or a combination of these. Often, the local population was forced to participate by digging the graves, collecting belongings or burying the victims, who had often lived nearby. Although there were predominantly Jewish victims, a large number of Non-Jews was killed by mass shootings, as well. On some sites people with differing religious, ethnic or political background were buried in the same mass grave. In certain cases the sites were even used by different perpetrators over a period of time.

Given the decentralized nature and enormous complexity of “Killing Sites”, preconditions for each individual site differ and need to be addressed in an appropriate manner. To date many “Killing Sites” have been identified, but many more are still not located, marked or commemorated at all. In recent years, scholarly work on this topic has been emerging and

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<sup>1</sup> With some rare exceptions e.g. the infamous mass shootings at Babi Yar.

many organisations and individuals have taken it upon themselves to address the subject. They have engaged in interviewing witnesses and survivors, identifying “Killing Sites”, involving the local communities in marking and preserving them, and developing educational material.

#### Previous endeavours:

The following selection lists only a few of these past and on-going efforts in order to illustrate the development in this area over the past years:

- Between 1995 and 2000 the Jewish Preservation Committee of Ukraine identified and visited 495 mass graves. Their list was published in 2005 by the United States Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad.
- Under the aegis of the UK’s Holocaust Educational Trust and Lord Janner of Braunstone the “Baltic Mass Graves Project” located and marked 308 “Killing Sites” in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.
- Yahad – In Unum was founded by Father Patrick Desbois in 2004 and seeks to identify every “Killing Site” in Eastern Europe, including interviewing eyewitnesses living near the sites and commemorating the victims.
- The Lo Tishkach European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative began as a joint project of the Conference of European Rabbis and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. Since its start in 2006 Lo Tishkach provides a publicly-accessible database of Jewish cemeteries and mass graves in Europe which contains more than 11,000 records on individual sites including information on their current status thus highlighting areas where support is needed the most. In addition Lo Tishkach has compiled a compendium of national and international laws and practices affecting these sites.
- The “Online Guide of Murder Sites of Jews in the Former USSR” and the online-platform “The Untold Stories: The Murder Sites of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of the Former USSR” was developed by Yad Vashem. So far it has identified more than 1,500 “Killing Sites”, adding details such as maps and interviews to many of them.
- In September 2009 the Russian Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress American Section initiated a cooperative project named “Dignity Return” in order to



bury the remains of victims of mass execution in a manner commensurate with Halakha (Jewish religious law).

- In 2010 IHRA commissioned Tal Bruttman, a historian in Grenoble, and of the Mémorial de la Shoah to prepare a “Report on Mass Graves and Killing Sites in the Eastern Part of Europe”.
- In January 2010 the American Jewish Committee initiated a cooperative and international project to seal and commemorate mass graves focusing on five pilot projects in Ukraine.
- In the same year the Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania was created by the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum and the Austrian Verein Gedenkdienst.
- At its November 2013 meeting in Berlin the Conference of European Rabbis decided to initiate a committee which will establish guidelines based on religious laws in order to deal with Jewish cemeteries and grave sites on a national and international scale.

#### Major goals of the conference:

The IHRA conference “Killing Sites – Research and Remembrance” was held January 22-23, 2014 in Krakow and co-hosted by the Pedagogical University of Krakow. It was the successful completion of the first stage of the Multi Year Work Plan “Killing Sites” and as such a flagship Project of IHRA. The conference invited 29 organisations and individuals to present their work. They were encouraged to share their experiences and relate the obstacles that they encountered in order to create a solid professional basis of knowledge on which future projects can be developed.

As an intergovernmental body IHRA can serve as a neutral platform facilitating contacts between organisations regardless of whether they operate in member countries or not. Thus the conference was intended to enable participants to share information and their experiences, to enhance mutual transparency, to talk about best practices concerning educational, preservation and commemorative efforts and to pool resources where possible. The conference strived to achieve a common understanding of “Killing Sites” and proposed finding and phrasing a definition since no common professional terminology exists.

It should be noted that the organisations involved are highly disparate. Background, approaches, motives, regional and local interests as well as goals differ, often to a great

extent. Nevertheless they all share one common interest: to save the “Killing Sites” from being forgotten, to wrest the so far unidentified victims from oblivion, giving them back their dignity. It is a race against time as in many cases documents detailing the events are scarce and the eyewitnesses and survivors, who can provide testimonies of the killings, are aging and passing away. To combine all efforts and to raise public awareness for the “Killing Sites” is therefore of tremendous importance.<sup>2</sup>

#### “Killing sites” – an overview of mass executions

In his compelling overview of mass executions under German rule during WWII, Dieter Pohl pointed out, that among the 5.6 to 5.8 million Jews murdered in the Holocaust between 2.0 and 2.2 million were victims of mass executions.<sup>3</sup> At the same time 1.3 to 1.5 million Non-Jews were shot by Germans and their Axis allies, among them victims of anti-partisan warfare, Roma, certain groups of Soviet POWs, mentally ill, Bosnian Serbs, and others. Overall, there were at least 3.5 million people shot under Axis rule.

A general pattern of Nazi mass executions was established in Poland, where mass shootings started as reprisals and became more systematized after the German conquest, when Polish teachers, clergymen and politicians were killed, as well as patients of psychiatric institutions.<sup>4</sup> Mass executions started again in Yugoslavia in the end of April 1941, when the Croatian Ustaša regime unleashed a campaign of extreme violence against Serbs with overall 300,000 victims. At the end of May the Germans began to shoot about 30,000 civilians of Serbia in alleged reprisals, turning more and more to Jews as hostages. With the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, marking the beginning of “the worst war of extermination in history,” political commissars of the Red Army were executed from the very first day of the invasion, mass killings of Jews started two days later in Lithuania and Western Ukraine. Aimed first at the Jewish intelligentsia in particular, mass shooting actions were directed soon against all Jewish men between the age of 16 and 45, from

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<sup>2</sup> As an achievement with regard to public awareness a front-page article of the New York Times featuring the conference should be mentioned: Alison Smale, *Shedding Light on a Vast Toll of Jews Killed Away From the Death Camps*, New York Times, January 27, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Approximately 2.5 million were murdered in extermination camps and about one million died under other circumstances. Pohl’s definition of a mass execution is “the killing of 10 or more victims herded together and shot in one place in order to bury the corpses in a common mass grave.”

<sup>4</sup> The Wehrmacht massacre of Poles and Jews in Czestochowa on 4 September 1939 was probably the first major mass execution. The killing of Polish intelligentsia continued until spring 1940, when at the same time in France, several massacres against French and British POWs were committed. Many black soldiers were among these French POWs.

August/September 1941 against all Jews including women and children. The further east, the more complete was the destruction in newly occupied territories.<sup>5</sup> More to the west, in occupied Poland, the situation differed. Jews from the east of the river Bug were usually shot after the dissolution of the ghettos in 1942, for example in Kovel, Pinsk, or Luboml. But also in the General Government mass executions took place on a regular basis, during ghetto raids or the hunt for Jews in hiding. In the context of anti-Partisan warfare it seems particularly difficult to draw a line between Jewish and Non-Jewish victims, the mass execution of Non-Jewish “partisan-suspects” being accompanied, for example, by the killing of all the Jews in nearby ghettos. Mass executions as a means to combat partisans spread from Poland to other German occupied parts of Europe, e.g. to Greece (1943) or France (1944), and were used during the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944, when all inhabitants of the Wola and Ochota districts were systematically killed.

Based on existing overviews, it is estimated that there are 5,000 to 10,000 “Killing Sites” in Poland, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, as well as several hundred in other parts of Europe. Mass executions were decentralized operations. Another characteristic is the high level of involvement of Axis soldiers and police, auxiliaries and local collaborators in mass shootings.<sup>6</sup> Local authorities were employed in order to recruit young people for a variety of jobs, such as digging the graves or cooking meals for the perpetrators. It was a general feature that there were witnesses to the killings. News and rumors spread quickly. While the drastic nature of ghetto raids and the closeness to the “Killing Sites” could make it horrifically clear to the victims what to expect, there were ambivalent reactions among the bystanders. On the one hand there were “low level profiteers,” searching for valuables or plundering the ghetto houses. On the other there were rescuers – particularly when close to a “Killing Site” – who took an enormous risk to hide Jews, POWs, partisans or other victims of mass executions. There are numerous challenges to a historiography of mass executions, especially on the micro-level. It is clear that mass executions were both an integral part of the Holocaust, and a general pattern of German rule, contributing to an atmosphere of insecurity and terror.

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<sup>5</sup> For example at major mass executions in Kiev, Dnipropetrovsk or Kharkiv.

<sup>6</sup> Axis troops, such as the Romanian army, Hungarian units or the Slovak Security Division, carried out mass executions themselves. Auxiliary units, such as the Araj's Kommando murdered together with mobile German murder units.

## Regional Perspectives

The comparative view on different national and regional contexts under which field work regarding “Killing Sites” is being done was an important part of IHRA’s conference. These shared perspectives, as experienced by those active in the field, shed light on the organisations themselves and on their different approaches and strategies. A strong focus was hereby placed on Ukraine, where most of the large mass killings at “Killing Sites” are located and where numerous organisations initiated their work. The perspectives from Poland, Latvia, and Romania have been equally valuable, showing many differences both on the level of international cooperation, and on the local level.

### Ukraine

Although the situation has improved in recent years, only about one third of the “Killing Sites” in Ukraine are marked, according to those working in the field. In many towns there is scarcely any knowledge of the former Jewish communities or its members. “Killing Sites” have been neglected and forgotten. In cases in which there are monuments, either they date back to the Soviet era, usually not mentioning that the victims were Jews, or they were established by private initiatives or descendants featuring an inscription in Hebrew which is indecipherable for locals. Especially newer monuments were mostly erected by international or national non-governmental organisations or private initiatives driven by enthusiasm and the moral or ethical urge to commemorate. These projects often lacked access to the archives as well as historical or local expertise. As a result some of the memorials which are scattered throughout Ukraine feature inaccuracies in their description, such as inexact numbers of victims or mistakes concerning the perpetrators and their identity.

In its “Online Guide of Murder Sites of the Jews in the Former USSR” and the project “Untold Stories” Yad Vashem provides an overview of the “Killing Sites” in Ukraine, including their exact location and additional information, particularly documenting the commemoration at the sites themselves. What seems crucial concerning the Ukrainian situation is that there is no government policy (and no funding) for the commemoration and preservation of “Killing Sites”. Therefore even nowadays, all activities rely on local or international initiatives.

Yahad – In Unum has been involved for many years in locating “Killing Sites”, noting their GPS coordinates and their current condition, developing a methodology for dealing with

“Killing Sites”, searching for eyewitnesses and recording their testimonies for future generations. To date, 1,867 video-interviews have been recorded by Yahad – In Unum in Ukraine alone.<sup>7</sup> In many cases this was the first time that the witnesses were interviewed at all, testifying more than 60 years after the killings took place. These are often the only accounts to offer insight into who the perpetrators were and most importantly to reclaim a small portion of the identities of those who were killed and buried at these sites. Still, locating, investigating and cataloguing the sites are of paramount importance, in order to document their location and make them accessible through the internet, together with the stories on the killings, and information on perpetrators and victims. Doing so, a whole typology of different types of mass graves has been made possible.

In a pilot project by the American Jewish Committee five sites in Ukraine have been chosen for further marking, preserving and commemorating.<sup>8</sup> Together with local experts the AJC developed methods and means for preservation, educational materials and an online-platform on these sites. The Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies in Kyiv has been the AJC’s partner responsible for developing and carrying out the education programs of the project, aimed at local teachers and students. By combining international and Ukrainian efforts the project shows the importance and benefits of cooperation between different organisations, while also illustrating that there is no way to preserve or commemorate a “Killing Site” without involving the local community first. Otherwise there would be no one to maintain the site once it was marked or to protect it from vandalism, desecration or even from scavengers looking for rumoured “Jewish gold”. However, until today, even local teachers have little to no background knowledge regarding the atrocities committed nearby. Without this information and further support they lack the tools and materials to educate on these matters. Although Jewish culture and Jewish history is deeply embedded into Ukrainian culture and history it is often neglected in public discourse. The Holocaust is part of the national curriculum but in reality there is often no time to teach it and in some cases

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<sup>7</sup> In the meantime, Yahad – In Unum expanded activities and research for “Killing Sites” to regions outside Ukraine. So far, 398 interviews have been carried out in Russia, 295 in Poland, 158 in Moldova, 88 in Romania and 49 in Lithuania. Typically, a research trip takes 17 days with a team of 9 people. This includes three investigators whose major task is to get in touch with locals and especially elderly villagers in order to find out if they were already living at that place during the war and in case this applies, if they were there at the time the shooting took place. The intended length of an interview is one hour but some run for two or even four hours. The main goal is to reconstruct the crime scene by analysing the facts and putting them into context with the local surroundings and the everyday life of the villagers.

<sup>8</sup> The project has received funding by the German Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

foreign scholars are better informed on recent findings than local researchers. Therefore emphasis must be put on schools and educational materials. The young generation must be given the opportunity to become engaged, to reclaim responsibility for their history and to make it a part of their own identity.

## Poland

As the event was hosted in Poland some national and local initiatives were mentioned at the conference: The Rabbinical Commission, the memorial at Tyniecki Forest and a student project at the Pedagogical University.

In a project which was initiated by the Pedagogical University, students identified war cemeteries, graves and sites of the execution of Jews in nearby Miechów County. Their findings were presented at the conference's market place.

At Tyniecki Forest near Krakow around 150 Jews from nearby communities were shot by Germans in July 1942. The killing became part of the collective memory in the adjacent village of Tyniec. In 2005 a memorial was erected, listing the few known names of victims (in Polish) and providing protection for the graves.<sup>9</sup> Conference participants had an opportunity to visit the memorial before the start of the conference.

Since its creation in 2002 the Rabbinical Commission in Poland has been taking care of Jewish cemeteries and what was left of them after the end of the Soviet Union. Over the years their duties have shifted and they increasingly deal with graves of murdered Jews from the Second World War, many of which are not mass graves. As a religious organisation their work is not only bound to Polish law but moreover clearly defined by adherence to Halakha (Jewish religious law). The Commission is headed by the Chief Rabbi of Poland who functions also as its supervisor.

The Rabbinical Commission does not investigate on its own. Instead the impetus to search for a grave in a specific region comes from the outside. In many cases the Rabbinical Commission is approached by eyewitnesses or people who were children or adolescents during the war and remember that the local Jewish community suddenly disappeared from sight. Sometimes these informants belong to the second or third generation, being either

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.sztetl.org.pl/en/article/skawina/0,unidentified/17742,masowe-groby-zydowskie-w-lesie-tynieckim-z-okresu-ii-wojny-swiatowej/> [last checked 1 March 2014].

relatives of an eyewitness or in some rare cases descendants of the victims. After receiving such a request the Rabbinical Commission starts to acquire archival materials regarding the location at the Polish Institute for National Remembrance, the major state established institution dealing with wartime records in Poland. Full access to all documents is granted. Further research is conducted at Yad Vashem and in numerous state archives as well as in local archives. The major goal is to discover as much information as possible about the victims. In certain cases this proves rather difficult as the official records and the accounts of witnesses do not always match.

As soon as the Rabbinical Commission has gathered as much information as possible it approaches the local communities and starts investigating on-site. Since Jewish law does not permit exhumation the Rabbinical Commission has to rely on non-ground breaking methods. When a grave is successfully located the Rabbinical Commission sets out to protect it.<sup>10</sup> The fact that these graves are scattered throughout Poland and are not confined to any single location or specific surrounding, but can be found in meadows, fields or even within city borders helps to remind that the Holocaust was not a distant tragedy but happened in the midst of even the smallest communities.

### **Baltic States/Latvia**

The museum “Jews in Latvia” has committed itself to research and commemorate the history of Latvia's Jewish community. Although “Operation 1005” actively destroyed remains of “Killing Sites” in Latvia as well, its retreat led to opposite effects and left behind some distinctive traces.<sup>11</sup> The employees of the “Jews in Latvia” museum have set out to locate and mark these graves. Until today around 100 stones have been put up to mark sites and prevent them from being disturbed or desecrated.

In the aftermath of the Second World War investigations in Latvia often started at a personal level. Jewish survivors returned to their hometown in order to research the whereabouts of their family members or neighbours. In some cases there are clues that graves were exhumed and bodies were reburied nearby, e. g. when people were killed near a Jewish

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<sup>10</sup> Given the capabilities at the current stage the Rabbinical Commission's work is not about erecting monuments or memorials, but rather about defining the exact boundaries of the grave in order to prevent any disturbances to the bones.

<sup>11</sup> In a forest near Riga the hasty retreat of “Operation 1005” left behind barrels of gasoline which were used in order to burn the remains and rows of newly planted pine trees which should have hidden the ashes underneath.

cemetery their remains were reinterred within the borders of the cemetery. Sometimes these incidents are mentioned at the original “Killing Site”.

Many early memorials carry differing inscriptions. While the Russian or Latvian inscriptions mention only “victims of fascism” or “Soviet citizens” as being killed at that specific site, the Yiddish inscriptions refer directly to the fact that Jews were murdered on that spot.<sup>12</sup> The authorities took over the commemorative processes in the 1970s. Numerous inscriptions dating back to that time show a double-standard with regard to the victims. While alleged Communists as well as Russian or Latvian citizens are usually mentioned by name or referred to in more detail, this does not apply to Jewish victims who were often only included as a number and subsumed as “other victims”. It is highly probable that this was done deliberately.

Since the early 1990s these proceedings have changed and victims of Nazi persecution are commemorated by Latvian communities. A historical commission was established in 1998 in order to investigate the crimes that happened in Latvia between 1941 and 1991. It did mainly focus on Soviet crimes but included sites of the Holocaust as well. Efforts to mark “Killing Sites” have been undertaken since the beginning of 2000. The first projects were conducted by international organisations and supported by local researchers and individuals: The U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad and its research director Samuel Gruber were interested in locating Jewish cemeteries while the UK's Holocaust Educational Trust and Lord Janner of Braunstone were focusing on the mass graves in the entire Baltic region.

In general, acts of vandalism at marked graves are not common in Latvia and feedback from local communities is rather positive. Often the local authorities or villagers know the exact location of non-recorded graves. This information is either handed down directly to their successors and/or their children or indirectly e.g. by warning them about accessing or disturbing a certain area which is considered taboo or cursed. In one case foresters took new colleagues to a small spot in the forest, a fox-hole, where Jews had been shot. Another case mentioned a forest path and a specific tree which was known to all villagers as the location where a Jewish family was shot and buried. Therefore local assistance to researchers is vital

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<sup>12</sup> This discrepancy was possible because most Soviet officials would not be able to read the Yiddish inscriptions and those who could decipher it would most likely not intervene.



especially with regard to identifying individual graves which would otherwise have resembled looking for a needle in a haystack.

## Romania

The first phase of the killings in Romania constitutes a special case as the Romanians started to kill entire Jewish families even before “Operation Barbarossa” and the German Einsatzgruppen starting to do so. A special unit of the Romanian army, the sixth mountain rangers regiment acted like a killing unit during the entire period of the war. Around 150,000 Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina reached Transnistria alive, two years later only 49,000 of them were alive. Analysing these events and their circumstances might contribute researching the Holocaust and its local mechanisms in general. Elie Wiesel, the USHMM, Yad Vashem, and others partook in the creation and ensuing research of the “International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania”. The International Commission’s findings were published in 2004 and recognized by the Romanian government.

Some of the killings in Romania are well documented: there are eyewitness accounts, survivor reports, documents, recordings, notes or files from war trials or smaller post war trials. A tremendous amount of documents was not accessible until recent times and thus has not been analysed because there are not enough researchers to do so. Furthermore some killings happened in secrecy and are still widely unknown as they did not leave any records or witnesses. As a result not all “Killing Sites” in Romania have been found, but it is rather certain that the majority of the mass graves in Romania have been located, even if not all of the sites have been marked, yet.

In contrast to many other countries there have been cases of exhumations in 1945, in the 1970s and in 2010. In 1945 the mass graves were approached by military authorities and local communities who conducted exhumations in order to document the crimes and file forensic reports. The victims were reinterred at the Jewish cemetery in Iași. The forensic reports provide rare insight and details regarding the killing process and its perpetrators. The exhumation in the 1970s was a result of diplomatic interventions; the remains were reburied in Israel. The last exhumation happened in 2010 after researchers found a mass grave. Approval from the Council of Romanian Rabbis, Romanian authorities and the national commission of archaeology was asked before the investigation started. Still, when the first human remains were found the military prosecutorial office was informed and took over all

further inquiries. The case was turned into an official genocide investigation and at least 336 bodies have been found. The whole procedure sparked protest from various Jewish organisations. Nevertheless when the Romanian authorities cleared the evidence i.e. the remains, even opposing organisations participated in their reburial at the Jewish cemetery in Iași.

### Common Issues

Even though the historical and legal situation in each of the presented countries is different, one common problem was highlighted by all organisations: time is running out. In a few years no one will be left to recount what had happened and to remember those who perished. As time cannot be stopped the initiatives need other means to compensate this impending loss. Although funding is a crucial factor it is not the most important one. Instead most of the participants would prefer manpower, people who will get involved and support their work. If there were more people or authorities engaged on a local level the organisations would no longer need to tend hundreds or thousands of graves. Instead the task could be delegated to teachers, priests or individuals who would investigate and maintain maybe five or ten sites in their vicinity. Such an approach would be perceived as part of local history and identity instead of being considered as some outsider's or foreigner's project.

### Forensic Issues

Although research and investigations on "Killing Sites" started immediately after the Liberation<sup>13</sup> most of these sites fell into oblivion. New interest was sparked in the 1990s when forensic investigations regarding wars in former Yugoslavia shed new light on technical means to research and analyze "Killing Sites" in general. The Germans' deliberate attempt to remove as much of the traces as possible was elaborated in Andrej Angrick's lecture on "Operation 1005", while Caroline Sturdy Colls' presentation illustrated the capabilities of today's forensic archeology methodology to find bodily remains and gather evidence on sites of the Holocaust. "Operation 1005",<sup>14</sup> the Nazis' endeavor to unearth and burn the corpses from all mass graves trying to dissimulate the traces of mass murder on the spot, was

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<sup>13</sup> By the Extraordinary State Commission (ChGK) in the Soviet Union, where most of the mass executions had taken place. Similar commissions were established in Poland and Yugoslavia.

<sup>14</sup> "1005" was simply a Gestapo rotation file number; its use was meant to obscure the operation's goals.

started in March 1942 when Paul Blobel<sup>15</sup> was assigned to carry out the operation. He started to do tests in the Chełmno extermination camp developing a working incineration method that would not leave any residue.<sup>16</sup> After the German defeat at Stalingrad and the Soviet propaganda offensive following the ChGK's disclosure of mass graves containing 20,000 Nazi victims at Rostov-on-Don in 1943, the first "Special Commando 1005" was sent out in order to prevent such a revelation from happening again.<sup>17</sup> Starting at Babi Yar in summer 1943, Blobel's commando succeeded in destroying the bodies of about 50,000 people just in time before the Germans had to retreat from Kiev.<sup>18</sup> Under constant time pressure, a number of "Operation 1005" special commandos were established with regional structures of SS and Police at different levels, e.g. in the General Government. Sometimes, as in Uman, the killing of additional Jews or suspected partisans went hand in hand, resulting in simultaneous incinerations of unearthened corpses and the bodies of recently killed people. The actual work was often done by inmates of local prisons, who were afterwards murdered on the spot. Already in June 1943 Blobel had issued an order not to create any more new graves. In the big picture, "Operation 1005" failed, as there were simply too many mass graves to cover up.

Forensic archeology applies archeological methods in a legal or humanitarian context in order to locate and document human remains and find buried evidence of both recent and historic crimes. In contrast to sites of mass killings in the former Yugoslavia, the Holocaust has emerged as a rather new topic in this field.<sup>19</sup> However, making use of forensic archeology can provide new evidence and a better understanding of the circumstances. Given the specific challenges of archeological work on the Holocaust, a proper "Holocaust Archeology" must be established taking account of religious and political sensitivities and focusing on non-invasive methods. In the past, archeologists failed all too often to include an

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<sup>15</sup> As head of Sonderkommando 4a Blobel had commanded the mass murder of more than 33,000 Jews in Babi Yar on 29/30 September 1941.

<sup>16</sup> The partly decayed bodies were soused with oil and fuel and burnt on grids of steel girders or railway tracks, stacking up to 2,000 bodies on such piles. If necessary, remains of bones were pounded by mortars and ground to bone manure.

<sup>17</sup> The first two special commandos "A" and "B" were active in Ukraine, later there was "C" for Central Russia and Belorussia, and "D" and "E" for the Northern, especially Lithuanian and Latvian territories.

<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, some of the 300 prisoners of Syretz concentration camp forced to do the actual work at Babi Yar were able to escape and soon reported about the atrocities via radio Moscow, which was considered an utter failure by Blobel.

<sup>19</sup> All too often it was assumed that everything was known from the historical record, especially at places, where monuments exist and some kind of excavations had been undertaken in the past.

ethical dimension, many excavating or coring even though it is a violation of Jewish religious law. Fortunately, forensic archaeological approaches, digital humanities tools and visual technology can go beyond excavations and offer the possibility for investigation, facilitate documentation and provide new possible forms of commemoration.

The interdisciplinary Holocaust Landscapes Project at Staffordshire University has carried out field work on three sites: At the former extermination camp Treblinka in Poland, at the former camp for Jews and political prisoners Staro Sajmište in Belgrade and on Alderney on the British Channel Islands. All of these were “neglected killing sites”, so it was to be expected that archeology can discover new information.<sup>20</sup>

The methodology begins with a period of desk-based searches, using mapping data and aerial photographs as well as applying techniques of offender profiling in order to locate lost and unmarked sites. What follows then is research on the ground, started usually with a walkover, often providing much of the evidence, such as objects and structures that exist in plain sight.<sup>21</sup> In order to look underground and detect disturbances in natural soil layers, geophysical techniques, such as GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar) are applied. The majority of previous grave diggings can be revealed with this method. In other cases (or additionally) metal detectors or resistance measuring devices are used. Non-invasive techniques like these can provide enough information to mark structures underground (such as barracks’ foundations) and also to identify mass graves. They are extremely useful when excavations are not permitted.

In Treblinka during six years of non-invasive research, using also an airplane based LiDAR laser survey of the terrain, thousands of landscape features revealed numerous mass graves at execution sites to the south of the camp. Previously these graves of predominantly non-Jewish victims had been thought destroyed; now a new map of the camp needs to be drawn. In summer 2013 permission was granted for an excavation in order to prove the graves existence. Within the same day of its discovery the grave was covered again. On Alderney, where concentration camp prisoners were exploited for the construction of fortifications, no

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<sup>20</sup> They also show a diversity of the Holocaust (with Treblinka’s more than 800,000 victims and 2,000 in Alderney). Current research is also focused on Jewish cemeteries as execution sites, specifically in Poland, where there is cooperation with the office of the Chief Rabbi of Poland.

<sup>21</sup> E. g. in Treblinka a systematic line search in the woodlands on the camp uncovered about 200 objects in less than half an hour.

excavation was ever permitted, so only non-invasive methods could be applied. The reason, however, was not Jewish religious tradition, but the fact that speaking about atrocities has been very contentious on the island, with local memory focusing solely on the Liberation.

Besides case study research, there are more systematic questions: How can archeology be used in education? The collaboration with communities and working with teachers and students is very much an issue in this respect. Invoking a sense of local ownership of a place and getting the public involved is also very important, while at the same time being a highly sensitive topic. The creation of an international data base of “Killing Sites” could facilitate the identification of previously unmarked sites, as well as provide new insights into both forgotten and well-known sites by combining photographic, cartographic and archeological evidence from the site. Regardless of the technical means employed, the human experience of places and events, including testimony, names and faces of the victims must always remain a vital part in such research. Archaeological investigation, identifying layers and addressing the physical evidence of events can play a key role in evaluating competing memories in contested spaces. Doing so, it often highlights sensitivities, excavations in particular being all too often also a ‘digging up’ of painful memories. The locations of numerous “Killing Sites” have become lost over time, but since the Holocaust altered Europe’s landscape also physically, traces remain of the killings. Whatever methods are chosen to investigate, they must be ethical and they must take into account the beliefs of people connected to these sites.

### **Legal and Religious Issues**

Locating and preserving “Killing Sites” is a difficult task on its own, but those who are active in the field face even more obstacles. Besides dealing with questions of ownership and ensuring the cooperation of nearby communities the organisations and individuals involved must adhere to various regional and religious laws when planning to preserve and commemorate a site. Every country has its own jurisdiction when it comes to burial, commemoration and conservation issues. Thus some international organisations advocate a trans-European law that would regulate the process. Other organisations do not see the need for such a procedure but would prefer that existing regional laws be implemented and enforced.

As the first panel focused on Ukraine and the conference was held in Poland the opportunity was used to shed some light on the legal situation in both countries.

Although Ukrainian legislation protects grave sites regardless of the victims' religion and prohibits the continuation of construction work as soon as human remains are found, it often happens that due to a lack of proper documentation or marking of the sites building projects were erected on grave sites. Such incidents result in bitterness on both sides: the constructors and the Jewish communities alike. It is often up to Jewish organisations, like the umbrella organisation Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine (VAAD), to remind the government of its own responsibilities and obligations and to raise awareness for sites that are not properly marked, treated disrespectfully or vandalized. By collecting documents, testimonies and information on the sites the VAAD provides evidence of their existence and files complaints or law suits when these places are not treated appropriately. The privatization of large areas of Ukraine has complicated these issues. Support by the central government is helpful, but local authorities can nevertheless pose an enormous obstacle in preserving a site. There are manifold reasons why local authorities might prove reluctant to help: there might be no interest in the topic; bribes are a common issue, as well as fear of future financial claims; and often the authorities are financially or personally involved in ongoing building projects. Thus the missing protection and preservation of grave sites in Ukraine is not caused by a lack of laws, but rather by the fact that the existing regulations are not implemented sufficiently.

In Poland the memorialization of mass graves and "Killing Sites" is subject to the war graves funds of the respective regions, which falls under the responsibility of the local governors. Hence whenever a grave is found and plans are made to commemorate the site the regional governors' office must be contacted. While general Polish law applies to all grave sites the local governors possess a scope of discretion.<sup>22</sup> The funding for a memorial can be obtained from public sponsors or from the state by applying for governmental grants. As soon as a grave is recorded in the governor's war graves list it falls under Polish law and its maintenance, protection and prosecution of vandalism becomes the responsibility of the local authorities. But before turning a place into a memorial site, the ownership has to be

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<sup>22</sup> This starts with phrasing the inscription and deciding on its length, which can be tedious work, as every single letter would produce additional costs.

clarified. If the site is located on state property the responsible institution has to be approached with evidences (archival findings, GPR data, eyewitness accounts, or similar recordings) documenting the grave site. If the area is privately owned there are two options: a) the owner accepts that this special space must not be disturbed at any cost and agricultural use is no longer permitted on this plot or b) the owner is not willing to give up the claims and use of the land. If the second option applies the local governors can become involved. The governors can offer to buy back the land or provide another plot in exchange. Usually the organisations refrain from such steps or from filing a law suit, as these proceedings would require lots of time and paperwork and would create a bad atmosphere which might redound to the site's disadvantage. In order to avoid precedents and prevent the grave from being perceived as a foreign spot amidst the village, the organisations involved do not offer to buy the plot themselves. Instead they negotiate with the owners and access local communities that could reason with their neighbours without directly forcing the owners to give up on their case, an approach that has proven to be rather successful in the past.

### Religious issues

The protection of mass graves is not only regulated by regional laws but touches a number of sensitive issues. As most "Killing Sites" include predominantly Jewish victims their preservation and memorialization should not only be a matter of the country's legislation but respect Jewish religious laws as well.

Even though Judaism is not a strictly hierarchical religion with a single authority that issues definite and binding statements, there are some principles which are shared and acknowledged by all major religious authorities. An essential aspect of burial rites is the perception of the grave site as an eternal resting place for the remains of the deceased. As soon as a body is buried in the ground it shall no longer be disturbed or moved at any cost. This rule honours the notion that the body is still linked to the soul and as such the remains and their resting place are sacred. While this claim is easily shared when it comes to cemeteries it sometimes provokes discussions when it comes to "Killing Sites" where the victims were thrown into mass graves. From a Jewish religious perspective the burial act itself does not define the way a burial site should be treated. The exhumation of a body is considered as violation of Jewish law and tradition and should be avoided by all means. The

only exception would be if the graves are at immediate risk of being destroyed. For example if due to a natural disaster a cemetery was flooded and the graves cannot be preserved or if they are located on a cliff and the ground containing the remains cannot be stabilized. In such rare and extreme circumstances it is possible that it would be permitted to move the bones because it would be for the benefit of the deceased. Often the question of relocating the remains arises when a grave is discovered and the location is regarded as inconvenient by the owners, the local authorities, or residents. Such relocation would not be for the benefit of the deceased but only for the profit or convenience of the living. This is basically unacceptable from a religious perspective and should not be done. In addition it would imply that the authorities and the surrounding society do not have enough respect and sensibility for the victims and place their own comfort above the victims' dignity.

In contrast to this relatively consistent approach, the question of dealing with scattered remains is a totally different matter. As the victims were properly buried, it is often regarded as a religious duty (*mitzvah*) to do so as soon as their remains have been discovered. This permission to gather and bury the bones is usually limited to the nearby area for two simple reasons. On the one hand it commemorates the place where they were most probably killed and on the other hand the buried remains are fragments, by burying them in the proximity of the place they were found increases the chances that they remain in the vicinity of the victims' body thus paying respect to the corporeal integrity of the deceased.

From a rabbinic perspective there is little to no room left for discussions on the matter if bodies could or should be moved. Nevertheless it was emphasized that there should always be time to explain the background of this decision. Providing the necessary insight into Jewish religious laws can help ensure local support for the sites as respecting the deceased and honouring their memory is a common basic principle in most religions and thus generally understandable.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Given a practice of sensitivity from both sides a good relationship between science and religion is possible, as Chief Rabbi Schudrich pointed out regarding his cooperation with Caroline Sturdy Colls [the project]. Forensic archeology then, can also teach lessons for the future.



## Databases and mapping initiatives

In the panel on databases and mapping initiatives, several good practice examples for internet based overviews on a national and regional level were presented.<sup>24</sup> Linking the local perspectives and the more general overview, initiatives like these establish virtual landscapes of “Killing Sites” accessible to a wider public, and provide more detailed information including personal stories.

Among the 1.5 million Holocaust victims in the Soviet Union the majority was killed by shootings, therefore there is a particular relevance of “Killing Sites” in this region. Yad Vashem’s project “The Untold Stories: The Murder Sites of the Jews on the Occupied Territories of the Former USSR” contains 600 murder sites in Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania and Latvia, often several for one community. Next to a brief history of the local Jewish community, information on the killing actions is presented and supplemented by source materials such as Einsatzgruppen reports, reports of the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission (ChGK) or letters.<sup>25</sup> Links to Yad Vashem’s Database of Shoah Victims’ Names and to the Database of the Righteous Among the Nations, as well as fragments of video testimonies complement many entries. The situation of commemoration on the spot is also presented, with Jewish survivors in some cases being able to mark the site in the post-war years, and in many other cases monuments being set up only in the 1990s.

The Polish database “Personal Losses and Victims of Repression Under German Occupation” has a different approach: Its goal is to establish a comprehensive database of all Polish citizens who were victims of German aggression and repression, thereby constituting a kind of virtual memorial, no matter if soldiers or POWs, members of resistance groups and partisans, prisoners of concentration camps, inmates of ghettos and work camps, or Holocaust victims, forced laborers, expellees and others are concerned. Until now, the database has gathered entries referring to 3.6 million individuals known by their names, as well as 420,000 anonymous victims. Researchers estimate an overall number of up to 6 million. A specific problem is to gain information on the former East of the multiethnic

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<sup>24</sup> Yad Vahem’s „Untold Stories“: <http://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/database/homepage.asp>; Project: “Personal losses and victims of repression under the German occupation”: [www.straty.pl](http://www.straty.pl); The Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania of the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum: <http://holocaustatlas.lt/EN/> [all of them: last checked 1 March 2014].

<sup>25</sup> Letters provide rare insights on a personal level often depicting individual situations. They are an indispensable source of information on private lives as almost no diaries of Soviet Jews exist.

Second Polish Republic, albeit including all citizens, also members of national minorities, is a crucial part of the project.<sup>26</sup> Cooperation with a large number of archives, libraries and media partners makes it a widely received data base project, oriented towards participation of individuals searching for relatives and submitting new information from their local context. Therefore the project can also help to discover and find new “Killing Sites”.

The „ Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania”, a project of the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum has gathered information on all 234 “Killing Sites” in Lithuania, published both online and in a Lithuanian and English book version. Next to a short description of the event, the perpetrators, the exact geographic coordinates and information on monuments are presented. In the Atlas sites of all mass murder actions against Jews from June 22, 1941 onwards are listed. Since some historians claim that the Holocaust as a genocide started in Lithuania only in mid-August 1941 it needs to be mentioned that in the Atlas also the earlier so called ‘communist sites’ are listed. The example of the city of Kedainiai, where the site of the shooting of July 20, 1941 is until today locally perceived as a ‘communist site’ shows the significance, since among the 125 victims of this murder there were 95 victims labelled “Jews” and only a minority of communists. The Atlas’s reception in Lithuania is not very encouraging. Despite the fact that the Atlas was on the Lithuanian Ministry of Education’s list of recommended literature, the majority of teachers cannot or do not want to use the Atlas, which is underlined by the fact that the English print version is almost gone, while the Lithuanian language version volumes are still on the shelves.

Since the sites’ significance is not self-evident, they are in need of explanation. The internet based databases and mapping initiatives provide an important tool of reference in order to raise awareness and direct to the actual sites, at the same time giving a very important overall picture.

### **Education and Commemoration**

One of the key questions of the conference’s panel on ‘education and commemoration’ was how “Killing Sites” can be included in Holocaust education, a major focus of IHRA since its creation. Based on the discussion, it can be said that only very few educational programs with a particular focus on “Killing Sites” seem to exist. What can be seen with the

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<sup>26</sup> Only 21 million of the 32 million Polish citizens in 1931 were ethnic Poles. 15% were Ukrainians, around 10% were Polish Jews, 5% Belarusians and 2% Germans.

commemorative activities and practices presented during the panel is that commemoration 'on the ground' necessarily relates to often very different regional and national contexts of remembrance.

The genocide of the Roma has been on the agenda of IHRA since 2007. The regional museum in Tarnów annually organizes the "Roma Caravan of Memory", a pilgrimage to different "Killing Sites" of Roma in Southeastern Poland, with its end in Auschwitz.<sup>27</sup> While Auschwitz-Birkenau is the central commemorative site regarding the Roma genocide in Poland,<sup>28</sup> the majority of Roma victims in Auschwitz were deportees from Germany and Austria. Local Polish Roma were not deported, but shot on the spot. In the village of Szczurowa in the Małopolska region there were around 100 Jewish and 100 Roma inhabitants. The Jews were deported and 'disappeared', whereas the Roma were killed before the eyes of the whole village in July 1943, which had a strong impact on the post-war village identity. In 1956 a local monument to the Roma was unveiled. There are other examples of commemoration of Roma victims on the local level, and overall around 20 "Killing Sites" of Roma are marked in the Southeast of Poland.

In Soviet Belarus the remembrance of civilian victims had been a part of the official memory policy. Although the victims appeared generally as "Soviet citizens", the "Yama" on former ghetto ground in Minsk was one of the few memorials, where the Jewish victims were called as such. Since the 1990s the Holocaust has been continuously paid attention to in Belarus<sup>29</sup> more recently often in a framework of a remembrance policy focused on national resistance, considering Belarus the only country where Jews were really active fighters. In one of the few remaining buildings of the Minsk ghetto, the Laboratory of History<sup>30</sup> opened in 2003, as a meeting place for survivors and an educational center, involving young Belarusian volunteers. The goal to promote a European culture of remembrance is also pursued by trying to contribute to a future memorial museum in Maly Trostenets including the "Killing

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<sup>27</sup> To date, there are not many possibilities to learn about Roma issues in the Polish educational system. The museum hosts the worldwide first permanent exhibition on the Roma people, opened in 1990. Its memory work is to be seen also as a contribution to identity formation of the Roma minority itself.

<sup>28</sup> August 2, the date of the murder of the last remaining Roma in Auschwitz in 1944, was also declared an official remembrance day in Poland in 2011.

<sup>29</sup> The architect Leonid Levin, who had been involved already in the construction of the Khatyn Memorial complex in the 1960s, designed a number of new Holocaust memorials at "Killing Sites" of Jews, e.g. in Gorodeya.

<sup>30</sup> A joint project of the German IBB (International Center of Education and Exchange) and the Union of Belarusian Jewish Associations and Communities.

Site” of Blagovshina, where also many German Jews were shot after being deported to Minsk.

The evaluation of Holocaust memorialization in Serbia presented at the conference was by contrast very critical. Despite Serbia having joined the IHRA as a full member in 2011, Holocaust memorialization seems to rely extensively on individual initiatives,<sup>31</sup> with a mainstream that still does not acknowledge the Holocaust as a unique event and sees its memorialization as subordinated to Serbian suffering. Staro Sajmište, a former Belgrade fairground on the left bank of the Sava river, functioned first, until May 1942 as ‘Judenlager Semlin’, where 7,000 Serbian Jews were murdered in gas vans. Later, more than 30,000 forced laborers passed through the ‘Anhaltelager’, of which more than 10,000 were killed or died of diseases. In the postwar era, the campground played only a marginal role and, despite two monuments, it continues to be a derelict place today. Staro Sajmište was run by the Gestapo, but on the left bank of the Sava and thus on Ustaša Independent State of Croatia territory. This had been reason enough in the past for nationalist Serbian historians to present the camp as an outpost of the Ustaša camp complex of Jasenovac, thereby placing it ‘elsewhere’, treating it as Croatian and not as Serbian history. It seems that only as long as Jewish victims can be placed at the periphery, their memory is accepted.<sup>32</sup> However, working towards a critical assessment of research on Jasenovac would be as necessary as a memorial at Staro Sajmište that would be both a memorial to all victims and a Holocaust memorial.

Speaking about the several levels of mass violence in the Polish-Ukrainian border region in 1941, Jacek Waligóra, a Polish priest who has been working in Western Ukraine for many years, shed light on the difficulty of doing memory work at the periphery, citing the example of the town of Dobromil, where more than 200 prisoners were killed by a NKVD henchman using a hammer, their corpses thrown into the pit of an old salt mine at Salina. After the invasion on June 22, Germans and Slovaks entered the town and were informed by local people about the atrocities. Local Jews were forced to exhume the bodies, many of them were killed, often beaten to death by Germans, Slovaks, sometimes also by the local

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<sup>31</sup> By individuals, NGOs or students, only sometimes supported by the state.

<sup>32</sup> The shift to April 22 as “Remembrance Day for Victims of the Holocaust and Genocide, and all victims of Fascism” goes in the same direction. Furthermore a “Remembrance day for all Serbian Victims of the Second World War” was established on October 21, without mentioning that among the 20-30,000 victims of retaliatory actions linked to this date, a quarter were Jewish men whose names are not known today.

Ukrainian and also Polish population. Today, no one seems to be interested in efforts to commemorate these dead. Locally there is an apparent sense of refusal, people emphasizing “No, only our people died here!” and remote killing sites of Jews are sometimes even misused as a waste deposit. After all, occasions to address Jewish, Polish and Ukrainian victims at the same time are rare.

Summing up it can be said, that both the importance and the difficulties of local commemoration initiatives came to the fore in this panel. Whereas the “Roma Caravan of Memory” quite easily brings together local memory of “Killing Sites” in Poland with the memory to murdered Roma at Auschwitz, the European and international dimension seems to play an important role for the commemorative activities in Minsk and Malyj Trostenets. However, taking account of the Holocaust memorialization in Serbia, a close look on the embedding of a general Holocaust narrative seems to be advised. After all, activists striving locally for appropriate commemoration at “Killing Sites” face many challenges which also seems to be true beyond Western Ukraine, in particular where there is more than one group of victims and competing memories are present. In this case IHRA’s role might be to offer academic advice and expertise on an international level, but also to offer support and recognition.

## Conclusion

One result of the first conference on “Killing Sites” stands out: The topic is complex by its nature and any attempt to enhance research, commemoration, and public awareness related to “Killing Sites” must be differentiated taking note of the local specifics, including the already active players in the field. Therefore first and foremost further exchange and discussion is advised, including those organizations that could not attend the Krakow conference.

There was much networking and exchange during those two days in Krakow: The conference’s multifaceted approach, which included both scholarly and practical projects, prepared a solid basis from which to move on. For those working “on the ground” smaller round table discussions or workshops on particular regional and/or other issues will be helpful in the future. Providing and sharing of information on funding options, new scientific approaches or current activities in the field, as well as sharing best-practice models will help to spare limited resources and capacities of many organisations, as well as even end up in

joint efforts. The fruitful exchange among active players on international, national and local levels has clearly shown the need of a future follow-up conference.

IHRA's role might be to facilitate the exchange of local initiatives, nongovernmental international organisations and political decision makers. It could help to improve networking, develop common understanding and sharing resources. By bringing international attention to less known "Killing Sites" IHRA could make a difference even on local levels and add value and meaning to long forgotten and neglected sites. Representing 31 member states, IHRA's political influence could help smaller organisations and regional projects to overcome obstacles by facilitating access to political leaders. IHRA should also consider supporting, where necessary, local educators, researchers and activists in commemoration in more direct ways.

At the same time, IHRA possesses the means to raise public awareness for "Killing Sites" in its member countries by making them a vital part of its agenda and including the topic in its public campaigns. It could offer financial support by awarding prizes or small grants for projects on the topic, host an inventory of existing organisations and projects on its website which in time might serve as first contact and comprehensive database for researchers, politicians, media and interested citizens alike.

### Open Questions

This conference was the first of its kind and as such it does not claim to offer an all-encompassing solution to all the questions that were raised. .

- The question of defining a "Killing Site" still remains. It is often difficult to progress in a field when all those who are involved have a different understanding of what a technical term means. By involving its own academic committee and the Steering Committee of the MYWP and combining their expertise IHRA might work as a lexicographer in this matter. IHRA's members could assist to phrase a definition, which might be helpful for all those working in the field.
- Another aspect that was central to most discussions was the issue if a site should be marked regardless of the fact that looting might ensue. A general advice in order to prevent desecration or demolition was to involve locals in the protection of the sites by inviting local authorities (like mayors, priests and principals/heads of schools),

providing educational materials for the sites and reaching out to younger generations.

- As “Killing Sites” have become the focus of many international initiatives the risk of potential duplication of activities has increased. In order to avoid this unnecessary strain on limited resources ways to enhance the flow of information and means to pool existing resources should be developed and mutual exchange encouraged. How this can be accomplished in the long-run is still has yet to be decided.
- The current political situation in some countries especially Ukraine might have an undeniable impact for those working on-site. It is still not clear to what extend the historic or recent change in borders (and national narratives) will influence future archival researches, local support for international projects or different groups of victims as well as general remembrance efforts and what measures can be implemented in order to assist regional initiatives when dealing with this issues.

### Recommendations

Due to its political impact and combined expertise IHRA should become a clearing house which could act as a neutral platform, enabling discussions and facilitating contacts and exchange of ideas on governmental and civil society level.

### Public Awareness

- The MYWP “Killing Sites” should become a part of IHRA’s agenda and as such should be included as an inherent part in its public campaigns
- IHRA’s website or the web presence of the MYWP “Killing Sites” should be expanded in order to include a prospective database on “Killing Sites” featuring contacts and link lists to all ‘players in the field’
- In order to achieve a long-lasting effect the findings of the conference should be published in an edited volume. This book would assemble texts from all active players in the field and offer further insight on “Killing Sites”. It would provide the first encompassing up-to-date collection on this topic
- IHRA should consider developing an exhibition on “Killing Sites” in English to raise international awareness for this topic. It should be shown at each plenary and could be translated into local languages.

- The grant program should be advertised more dominantly and include projects associated with “Killing Sites”

### Continuous Work/Sustainability

- In order to ensure continuity and provide public accessibility the MYWP needs a central contact person. Therefore the IHRA should consider employing an assistant to the SC (part-time) who will be assigned to create, update and maintain an online database on “Killing Sites” featuring all organisations (governmental, private, public) which are active in the field. He or she should stay in touch with all organisations that are present in the field, keeping them updated through newsletters and taking care of a continuous flow of information, answer public requests and provide general information on the MYWP.
- IHRA’s Funding Review Committee should include “Killing Sites” in the Grant Program. By doing so the IHRA could support smaller projects and young scholars. In addition to regular grants the IHRA should contemplate the following possibilities: enabling local organisations to participate in international meetings or conferences, offering seed funding or awards for noteworthy research or projects should be checked.
- The conference “Killing Sites – Research and Remembrance” was the first of its kind. To ensure its long-lasting impact, follow up conferences should be initiated and be happening on a regular basis. Furthermore smaller round table or group discussions could be established in order to enhance practical and scientific exchange of ideas. In order to provide practical input for those working in the field the implementation of regular workshops should be considered.

### Organisational Level

- IHRA should consider employing its own expertise in the field in order to discuss and develop educational materials and support local archival access. By combining the efforts of the SC “Killing Sites” and different Working Groups it would be possible to pool resources in order to support local initiatives and researchers. Especially the Academic WG could help phrasing a definition which is applicable to the presented projects, remains flexible, considers the named problems and can form as a common ground for future work in the field



- As an intergovernmental body IHRA might consider issuing a declaration that all member countries will respect Halakha when dealing with “Killing Sites”
- Member countries that include “Killing Sites” could provide regular status reports and add the topic to their national curricula. Including “Killing sites” in school curricula should also be emphasized in countries without any sites on their own territory. In addition Human Rights organisations, NGOs and local initiatives (e.g. Jewish or Roma communities) should be invited to write critical reports or file complaints on the current situation in their country and offer recommendations.
- In general IHRA should actively support initiatives working on “Killing Sites” in their member-countries. Furthermore it should get in touch with external organisations like ODIHR or the Central European Council when it comes to non-member countries.

