

Holocaust Museum Sarajevo

Today's world is characterized by an extreme increase in fascist ideologies, xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia. It is therefore more important than ever before to be aware of the potential dangers created by these phenomena.¹ As well, the Holocaust Museum, in addition to preserving the culture of Holocaust remembrance, is also a reminder of the importance of education for intercultural dialogue, democratic values, education against prejudice and stereotypes of all kinds, strengthening solidarity between people, and responsibility for the well-being of every member of the community. In this context, the Holocaust Museum, located in the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, will also represent a public educational institution with an emphasis on strengthening the role of museum activity in education.

Thus, the Holocaust Museum, based on contemporary cultural and museological tendencies today, will also accept a constructivist approach to knowledge and learning, which means that it will recognize the fact that museums, or institutions of the culture of remembrance, have the potential to negotiate cultural boundaries and limitations and, accordingly, create contact zones where identities, exhibition artifacts, people and objects can discover a diverse spectrum of new possibilities for personal and social life, and for the democratization of society in general.²

From the aspect of the Museum's educational function, it is of utmost importance to include the academic scientific community, or to emphasize the research and scientific segment of activity in this area, which would provide a serious and adequate contribution to the educational role of the Museum with its scientific research projects. This does not only mean cooperation with other educational institutions, schools, faculties, academies, which is elementary in this particular case, but also to give young people the opportunity to create content in the Museum. In this way, it will be possible for people to identify with the victims of the Holocaust, their suffering and suffering, and at the same time, on an emotional and cognitive level, open up space for humane actions in the reality in which they live, arouse moral responsibility towards the Other and the Different, placing the human being at the epicentre.

The museum will also represent an aesthetic contact zone (museum artefacts, various projections, workshops, debates) between the past, the present and the future. The aforementioned contact zone in the museological sense implies the already mentioned most important fact, the link between the social inclusion of the museum and learning with an emphasis on revitalizing one's own role in society and responsibility towards society, especially the younger generations.

MISSION

The Holocaust Museum is a cultural institution for documenting, studying and interpreting the history of the Holocaust and serves as a tribute to the millions of known and unknown victims of the Holocaust. It is a museum that interprets the specificity of human cruelty, which does not shy away from the greatest atrocities in order to achieve its goals. At the same time, the Museum's mission is to present the specificity of human kindness, solidarity and humanity when it comes to people who sacrificed their existence and even their bare lives to help Jews from the onslaught of fascist persecution.

¹ Report of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, 2001.

² *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 22. (1.) 1–22.

The Museum will also work to develop awareness of the fight against all forms of violation of the human rights of every person, their life and property.

The Museum will represent a meeting place for people of different cultures and world-views, different generations, scientific, artistic, professional communities, young people from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina, the region and the world. With this Museum, Sarajevo will show that it has not forgotten its Jewish fellow citizens who, just because they were Jews, were tortured and killed. At the same time, this confirms that Jews are an indispensable element of the entire Bosnian and Herzegovinian cultural identity, life and existence, and since their arrival in Bosnia and Herzegovina they have made and are still making their selfless contribution to all areas of our society.

The museum and its concept will confirm the multiculturalism of Bosnia and Herzegovina's society throughout its history, the urgent need to further build and nurture it in these turbulent times.

With the start of World War II, German expansion into the Balkans, and the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia, the position of the Jewish community deteriorated significantly, and it quickly became an open target of the newly created state, i.e. its laws and repressive apparatus. The first arrests of Jews began on the very day the Independent State of Croatia was established, 10 April 1941, and continued in the following days. Attacks on Jewish religious buildings also began immediately after the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia, and the first demolition of a Jewish religious building occurred on 14 April 1941, when the Osijek synagogue was destroyed, and on 16 April the largest synagogue in the Balkans was demolished in Sarajevo.

A legal provision on the protection of the Aryan blood and honor of the Croatian people. (These provisions were primarily directed against Jews and Roma [Gypsies], and aimed at their biological destruction.) The adoption of new laws that enabled and facilitated violence against Jews, as well as other population groups (mostly Serbs and Roma), of course continued after that.³

In the first months of the establishment of the new government, new laws were passed against the Jewish community in the Independent State of Croatia. Jews were restricted in their freedom of movement, provisions were made on the need to wear yellow armbands with the Star of David as a sign of recognition of Jews from other citizens, Jewish families were relocated from more elite neighbourhoods, i.e. settlements (e.g. in Banja Luka), to less "conspicuous" and less elegant parts of the city (mainly on the outskirts), new contributions were announced for groups of arrested Jews...

The first camps were organized by the Ustashe in the spring of 1941. Among them were the Danica camps near Koprivnica and Kruščica near Travnik as collection camps, and from the end of June the "Gospić system of camps" was organized (Metajna and Slana on Pag, and Jadovno on Velebit), which were soon transformed into death camps. This was followed by the establishment of some other camps such as Đakovo, Tenje and Loborgrad. In 1941, the Ustashe founded the Jasenovac complex. In addition to these camps, there were also camps in the Italian occupation zone, the largest of which was Kapor on Rab, where several thousand Jews were detained, mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁴

The highest percentage of victims was among the Jews of Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia. It is reliably known that about 70% of the Jewish population perished in Bosnia and Herzegovina, if we do not take into account the Jewish refugees, of whom there were several thousand in Bosnia.

As for the losses of the Jewish people from the territory of the Independent State of Croatia during World War II, of the approximately 35 000 Jews who were approximately in the Independent State of Croatia, their lives were lost – some in various camps outside the Independent State of Croatia, some in death camps and camps in the Independent State of Croatia itself – slightly less (by a few thousand) than 30 000.⁵

3 The Council of Europa: www.coe.int. 2014 (last access: 4 August 2025).

4 Tauber 2014.

5 <https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/resistance-responses-collaboration/collaboration-outside-of-germany/croatia/> (last access: 4 August 2025).

WHY A HOLOCAUST MUSEUM?

The need to establish a Holocaust Museum in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been recognized at the state, cantonal and local levels, so this study defined the basic starting points for the establishment and determination of the museum's activities, then the institutional framework for financing and location-spatial assumptions in order to define all relevant modalities and factors for the establishment of the Museum before the development of project documentation and the final architectural solution. This idea has been considered for years within the Jewish Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sanctioned persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and their collaborators. »Holocaust« is a word of Greek origin and means »victim of fire«. The Nazis, who came to power in 1933, believed that Germans were »racially superior« and that Jews were condemned to »a life unworthy of life«. During the Holocaust, the Nazis also targeted other groups for what they considered to be »racial inferiority«: the Roma/Sinti (Gypsies), the disabled, and some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians and others). Other groups were persecuted for political reasons or behaviour, including communists, socialists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and homosexuals."

In January 2000, 46 governments, including 41 OSCE participating countries, signed the Declaration of the International Holocaust Forum in Stockholm, stating that

"the Holocaust (Shoah) fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilization. The hitherto unrecorded character of the Holocaust will always retain its universal meaning. After more than half a century, it remains an event close enough in time that survivors can still bear witness to the horrors that engulfed the Jewish people. The terrible suffering of many millions of other victims of the Nazis left an indelible scar all over Europe. (...) We share the obligation to remember the victims of the Holocaust and honour those who opposed it. We encourage appropriate forms of Holocaust remembrance in our countries, including Holocaust Remembrance Day, once a year."

A Holocaust Museum is a museum, learning centre, or permanent exhibit dedicated to education and preservation of the Holocaust. The role of a Holocaust Museum is to collect, preserve, research, and present to the public objects and materials of cultural, religious, and historical significance for the purpose of education and raising awareness about the Holocaust.

As a living memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, a Holocaust Museum teaches the history and lessons of the Holocaust and encourages leaders and citizens to confront hatred, prevent genocide, promote human dignity, and strengthen democratic values.

Today, we face an alarming increase in anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial – even in those countries where the Holocaust occurred – as well as genocide and threats of genocide in other parts of the world. This is happening just as we approach the time when Holocaust survivors and other eyewitnesses will no longer be alive.

In a world with increasing ethnic violence and ideological extremism, the rise of anti-Semitism and the continuation of genocide, the opening of such museums has never been more important. Holocaust museums provide a powerful lesson about the fragility of freedom, the myth of progress and the need for vigilance in preserving democratic values. With unique power and authenticity, museums teach people about the dangers of hatred and the need to prevent genocide and encourage them to act, fostering a sense of moral responsibility among our citizens, with which they will respond to the enormous challenges facing our world.

Most people, especially young people, don't know the basics of how monstrous human minds can be at times.

It is obvious that today's post-war generations, who did not have direct war experience, are exposed to far from simple dilemmas. The results of the survey, as well as the answers obtained through interviews, indicate that the members of these generations are well, much more widely than the pre-war generations, informed and educated about topics related to the concept of peace, peace work, human rights (86% acquired this knowledge by the time they finished high school).

This cognitive aspect is the basis for every other type of action. At the same time, it was shown that the influence of their immediate environment, especially family (31%), teachers (30%), on the understanding of the past is still very strong. 68% confirm that they have a dilemma between the interpretations offered by the war generations and their own views. This dilemma is burdensome (only 4% of respondents claim that young people are less burdened by the past than older generations). As problematic as this dilemma is, it proves that young people do not yet accept the current situation as a normal and acceptable state of affairs, which means that, at least, there is a latent, but broad interest in the issue of peace, and then peace work.

The Holocaust Museum, with its interactive contents, would certainly contribute to the critical thinking of young people, because the education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina has its limitations in this regard.

WHY SHOULD THE HOLOCAUST MUSEUM BE IN SARAJEVO?

The protection and presentation of heritage and heritage as well as the overall cultural history is an important segment of the functioning of local government in modern society. Culture and its segments are increasingly being transferred as one of the important interests and activities of local government, primarily municipalities and cantons.

Sarajevo is the capital and largest city of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It can be freely said that the city of Sarajevo is the urban, economic, administrative, university, cultural and artistic centre of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thanks to its rich spiritual, historical and natural appearance, Sarajevo is far better known than some of the larger cities in the world. It has about 429 000 inhabitants.⁶

Sarajevo is a cosmopolitan, multicultural, multiethnic, multi-confessional city with almost half a millennium of tradition of coexistence (La Convivencia). Jews, together and equally with all other peoples, have built and incorporated themselves into Sarajevo. The most famous Haggadah – the Sarajevo Haggadah – is also kept in Sarajevo.

Sarajevo must be a city that will have a Holocaust Museum, a museum that will, in addition to remembering the victims of the Holocaust, also cherish the memory of all the Righteous Among the Nations, of all the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina who showed courage and protected the Jews during World War II and the Nazi occupation.⁷ That is why the Holocaust Museum is needed, not only for Sarajevo, but also for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the region, Europe and the world.

The museum should become a place of education for the younger generation who are searching for facts from the past. The museum must at the same time satisfy different types of visitors – from scientists, tourists, to students and pupils. In addition to museum exhibits that in themselves testify to the Holocaust, an interactive approach is needed that will interest visitors in getting to know the contents of the museum, and encourage them to further research. The Holocaust Museum will have a strong educational component, where strong cooperation will be envisaged with educational institutions from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina, and especially from Sarajevo. In addition to content for youth and children, the Museum will pay special attention to working with teaching staff, to facilitate their presentation of the Holocaust.

This type of cooperation with educational institutions will be achieved through group visits to the Museum, the creation of reports or literary works, and on the occasion of marking significant dates. In order to achieve the best possible results, education of teachers and students will be carried out in the United States of America, Israel and France. In addition, study trips and visits to the Auschwitz concentration camp will be organized.⁸

6 <https://www.britannica.com/> (last access: 4 August 2025).

7 Tauber 2010.

8 Dr. Eli Tauber: IHRA Plenum. Zagreb, 2024.

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