"We need a visage in Finland"

A report on a survey about the need of founding of, the mandate of and the content of a museum for the members of the Finnish Jewish parishes.

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Abstract: *Unlike many other European countries, Finland does not have a Jewish museum, even though the Finnish Jewish minority has an undeniably significant and long history in the fields of science, art, economy as well as politics. In the study "We need a visage in Finland", the thoughts and attitudes of the Finnish Jewish minority with regard to the founding of a museum are discussed. The study clarifies the issues with which the project is supported or opposed in the Jewish community, and why. It also explains what kind of museological activities the community members feel are important and how Judaism gets presented to the parishioners themselves. Through a museum, the Finnish Jewish community would like to help build a diverse and open society by offering information about their faith and their culture, and this way do their part in hindering the proliferation of extremism and racial hatred.*

Key words: Jewish heritage in Finland, legitimacy to establish the museum.

"A Jew is a person, who opens up a newspaper in the morning and first flips to news of Israel or Judaism in the world. If he finds nothing, he sighs with relief." (Torvonen 1989: 210)

The Diaspora did not mean the end of the Jews as a people, who kept their beliefs strong, a bond that connected the isolated peoples together. The Torah and the Talmud are central to the Jews, even to this day even if they are no longer racially, ethnically or by language a unified group. That said, the Jews have kept their distinct features as a people in

Finland, as well as the rest of the world, whose history is often interlinked with world history in meaningful and sometimes dramatic ways. The Jews are a minority everywhere – the only exception naturally being the state of Israel.

Around the world, where there is a Jewish community, there is often also a Jewish museum. The Jewish museums of today are founded after the Second World War both to remind of the horrors of the war, but also to showcase the richness of Jewish culture in general. The most important tasks of Jewish museums worldwide could be said to be to

depict the various phases of the Jewish peoples, to increase knowledge of Judaism as a whole and to preserve Jewish culture.

THE GOALS OF THE SURVEY AND THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

This report is based on my study of museology at Jyväskylä University. It gathers members of all the Jewish parishes in Finland under the same survey, which is designed to clarify how Finnish Jews relate to the presentation of their own culture by the means of heritology. The study makes it possible to get information on the expectations of the Finnish Jews with regard to the function of their parish. Having accurate, to date information of the wishes of Jewish communities towards society as a whole and towards their parish is vital to the planning, execution and estimation of the effects of cultural politics.

The source material for this study is an online questionnaire, conducted interviews as well as literature in the field and the newspaper of the Jewish parish, *Hakehila*. The study method is both a quantitative as well as a qualitative analysis, the main objective being to clarify how Finnish Jews relate to the presentation of their own culture by the means of heritology.

This report looks at the following questions:

- Do the members of Jewish parishes in Finland feel the founding of a museum is warranted?
- What arguments are put forth to either support or oppose the idea of a museum and why?
- What kind of museum activities do the members themselves deem important?
- How does being a Jew present itself to the members themselves in this day and age?

- What kind of functions and contents do Jews attach to their culture in Finland?
- In what way are Finnish Jews a part of the building of a diverse society?

PREVIOUS STUDIES

There are no previous studies into the views on the Finnish Jewish community with regard to the founding of a museum. Instead, a conversation has been kept for years in *Hakehila*, the Jewish community's newspaper, about the preservation and recording the identity of Finnish Jews. I have had access to the volumes from 2002-2011 of *Hakehila* for the purposes of this study.

We shown ourselves to be an active and vibrant Jewish community, which is committed to keep and protect the valuable legacy passed on by previous generations. (*Hakehila*. No. 4, 2009: 6)

The most important work to address the history of Finnish Jews, *Kadimah*, was written by Taimi Torvinen in 1989. *Le Chaim!*, published in 2006 is a mainly photographic piece on the history of Finnish Jews. *Juutalainen kulttuuri*, Jewish Culture, a Finnish collaboration from 1998 also sheds some light on the culture of Jews in Finland.

Katalin Deme, a researcher at Aarhus University in Denmark, deals in her article 2010 named *Jødiska museer, jødiske identiteter og stereotype* in the journal *Nordisk Museologi* with the manifestations of Jewish identity and stereotypes with regard to Jewish museums.

THE RESEARCH MATERIAL AND RESEARCH METHODS

The target groups for this study were the

114 membership of the Finnish Jewish parishes of Helsinki and Turku in the spring of 2011. Limiting the subject matter to the members of Helsinki and Turku was natural and most practical for the execution of the study. The benefit of studying persons who were members of the parish was the effective and trustworthy contacting of the subjects via the parish itself.

The study was implemented in the spring of 2011, and the method of information gathering was chosen to be an online survey, because it is a modern, cost-effective, dependable and fast means of reaching your intended, highly limited target group. The link to the survey was passed on by the parish to all members with a valid email address. The parishes estimated a total of approximately 1300 recipients to the survey either via letter or email.¹

All in all the survey yielded 103 responses. This makes the total of responds 8% of the membership of the parishes. The response was meager, but the sample is actually quite large with regard too the size of the total population, and this result may be seen to reflect the overall attitudes. There is a possibility that we may have increased the number of responses had we sent the survey as a traditional paper printout as well. Statistics show that only about 40% of pensioners between the ages of 65-74 actually use the internet.² However, only a fourth of responses came from people aged 20-30, who are the biggest users of the internet. Therefore it is a distinct possibility that those who responded are the most active in their parishes, or otherwise felt strongly about by the subject matter. No responses came from members under 20 years of age, even if the preservation of Jewish culture heritage will likely touch them personally at some point in their lives. It is also possible that the

information about the survey simply did not reach the youngest members of the parish.

A link to the survey was sent to the members of the parishes in Helsinki and Turku by their respective organisations, and it was also referred to in the membership newsletter. This was done to ensure large enough participation in the study. Answering the survey was strictly anonymous, which was hoped to lower the threshold of participating. The respondent was given the option of leaving their contact information, if they so desired. The links sent to the members were personal and thus limited to one login only. This was to ensure that each individual only partook once in the survey. However, each family member could answer separately.

Targeting a survey to a wide membership base, demands more common questions. The benefit with asking them directly is that you get personal answers from the members themselves. The expectations and attitudes are authentic, and as such a very interesting read. The survey questions were designed with in cooperation with Dan Kantor, the representative for the Helsinki Jewish parish. The questions and the possible answers were given in such a way as to leave as little ambiguity as possible, from both the respondents and the interpreters standpoint. The goal was to have answers that defined the attitudes and wishes of the respondents as accurately as possible. However, a survey designed for a wide, heterogenic group of people must have some compromise to rule out uncertainties. The challenges of a sample study are issues related to validity, such as misunderstandings or errors in interpretation, so in this case the survey had multiple choice questions as well as free-form questions where the respondent could freely formulate an answer.

The survey had four parts. The first part surveyed the respondent's background information. The second part inquired for the respondent's opinion as to whether or not Finland needs a museum about Jews and Jewish culture. The third part surveyed the respondent's notions and opinions on what kinds of objects, things or events a museum about Finnish Jews might present. The fourth part inquired as to the meaningfulness of different kinds of museums to the respondents.

RESPONDENTS TO THE SURVEY

We received 52 responses from women and 51 responses from men to the attitudinal survey. The gender distribution of the Helsinki parish³ is slightly different, since there are marginally more female members, approximately 55,6%. Thus, the men were slightly more engaged with this survey.⁴

Of the respondents to the survey the far greatest group, 35%, were between 50 and 60 years of age. The second largest group were those between 60 and 70 years of age and the third largest group were the 30-40 year old members. The age demographic of the respondents corresponds fairly accurately with the age structure within the Helsinki parish membership with regard to the more senior members.⁵ In contrast, the largest age group, the under 20 year olds, is entirely absent.⁵

Of the respondent membership of the Jewish parishes, a full 42% has a higher education degree. The survey has therefore seemed mostly to attract members with academic degrees specifically. There is no current information on the education background of the membership of the Jewish parishes, so a comparison to the entire membership cannot be accurately made. The latest study on the demographic of

Jewish people in Finland was made by Taimi Torvinen in 1989 in the book *Kadimah*, which deals with the history of Jewish people in Finland. During the last two decades, however, there has been a surge of immigrants from the Baltic states and Russia, adding to the membership base. According to research, the educational level of the Jewish people is generally higher than the average, in Finland as well as other countries. The educational background of the respondents to this survey goes hand in hand with the educational statistics put forth in Torvinen's work.

THE ATTITUDES OF THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE JEWISH PARISHES WITH REGARD TO THE FOUNDING OF A MUSEUM OF THEIR OWN

A vast majority, 89% of all respondents felt the need for a museum about Finnish Jews and Jewish culture. There were several arguments for the foundation of such a museum in their responses, from educational work done outside the Jewish communities themselves to the recording and appreciation of their own communities' work, which are naturally the most traditional roles for a museum.

Seven percent of the respondents could not formulate an opinion on the matter. Unfortunately none of them qualified their answer, so it is not possible to detect why they had chosen this answer.

Five percent were negative to the question of the need for a museum on Jewish people and Jewish culture in Finland. All those who chose this as their answer, qualified their response similarly: they felt that the Jewish community in Finland is too marginal in size and too "little" in history to warrant the founding of a museum at this time.

116 THE LONG HISTORY OF FINNISH JEWS AS
MOTIVE FOR FOUNDING A MUSEUM

The respondents qualify the need for a museum with historical facts in particular. Many bring forth the strong, nearly two centuries of tradition of Finnish Judaism, which reach into many facets of society; economics, culture and politics, even to this day. Many also reminded that the Jews were the first minority to be given the rights of citizenship when Finland gained independence. The members of the parishes feel Jewish history is an inexorable part of Finnish history and they wish to be proud of their culture. Also, the Finnish Jews feel so well assimilated into the mainstream of Finnish society that the bringing forward of their distinct culture seems warranted.

"There is almost two hundred years of Jewish history in Finland. That's a good reason."

"We are a part of this society, are we not?"

"An honourable history bears keeping and being made public."

"Jews are a part of the history of Finland."

"Jews have been here for over 150 years and are a part of the Finnish people. Jewish culture is a wealth for Finnish culture as well."

"Though our minority may be small, it is still an integral part of the history of an independent Finland, and that is why it deserves its own museum."

Many of the responses reflected the notion that the long history of the Jews in Finland is in itself enough justification for the founding of a museum, and that the founding of one would further solidify the status of Jews in Finland. Many respondents felt that the wholeness and vitality of their own communities was still intact and well preserved, even against the many assimilation projects of the state, and

for this reason too a museum for such a vibrant community would be warranted. The Jewish community in Finland is different from other eastern European traditions in that it (nearly) entirely escaped the holocaust.⁷ That Jewish traditions were allowed to carry on where they were from the 40's and on and assimilate new influences, made Finnish Judaism authentic in a way and as such most interesting to many respondents.

THE INCREASING OF TOLERANCE AS TASK
FOR THE JEWISH CULTURAL MUSEUM

In addition to wanting the museum to bring to light the history of Jews in Finland, one of the key motives among the respondents was to emphasize the belonging to Finnish culture through diversity and tolerance.

"The founding of a Jewish museum in Finland could help the Finnish people accept that there are groups of people in this country, who have come here at different stages of the country's history. That is why I feel the need for a museum such as this."

"Because every culture and the history thereof is important to humanity."

"It is a good thing that there would be a place where dependable information on society's classes is gathered, of as many people and kinds of people, which will affect the knowledge of the history of all societies. If you know nothing, you can't understand anything either and unless you feel that there is a place where you can get dependable information, then things will just stagnate without a views to a developing future."

"We need a visage in Finland."

According to the respondents the function of the Jewish parishes has been diverse from the beginning. They say that Judaism hasn't changed in any meaningful way, but that the

demographics of the parish have changed due to immigration. Many also feel that the parishes of today are active, diverse communities.

CORRECT AND RELIABLE KNOWLEDGE

According to several respondents, the views of the mainstream population on Judaism in general is borderline flimsy or erroneous, and the museum was seen as a way of dispersing correct and reliable knowledge, and as a means to increasing tolerance toward Jews. The museum was seen as a strong educational tool by the respondents. The replies clearly indicate that especially schools would be welcome visitors, regardless of age group or religious background. They also strongly believed that tourists would be interested in visiting a museum on Finnish Jews.

"Having correct information about Jews may alleviate anti-Semitism."

"Because there's a lot of false information of the position and history of Jews in Finland."

"General knowledge of history, of which the common student knows little of. Would be of wider interest."

"It feels like not much is generally known in Finland about Jewish history and culture. I believe it would interest many and enrich the cultural field in Finland."

"So that a larger audience would understand more about Jewish culture, history and traditions. At the same time, it would benefit the young as well as future generations."

The members who answered our survey felt that the opportunity to tell the history of Jews in Finland, the why and where from where they came here, would be important. The museum was also hoped to shed light on the backgrounds of traditionally Jewish trades and the reasons behind the "ghettoes", the why

Jews were only allowed to live in certain parts of Finland in the beginning. They also felt that through the museum, Finnish Jews might have the opportunity to get to know their roots, perhaps get informed about their own heritage and thus become more whole and empowered. Naturally, the museum's role in research also surfaced in the survey. Those who were of a like mind with the survey felt the need for more research into the history and present of Finnish Jews, and this, they felt, would be much helped by having the museum. It was also hoped that the museum would participate actively in academic discourse.

THE MUSEUM AS A BUILDER AND STRENGTHENERS OF IDENTITY, AND AS AN EXTENSION OF HUMAN MEMORY

The Finnish Jewish museum was seen as a strong instrument for the building and strengthening of their Jewish identity. According to the respondents, a museum would connect Finland with the group of other European Jewish museums, and as such connect Finnish Jews more deeply to global Judaism. The Jewish double identity associated with the Diaspora isn't always easy to live with, and because of this the museum was seen as strengthener of this particular feature as well. The identity can be experienced to act as a kind of link to the past. Museums make it possible to experience oneself as a part of the continuum of generations.

"There is no knowledge, no wisdom, no understanding, no future without a past."

"It (a museum) is necessary to strengthen the roots of Finnish Jews."

"Yes, the matter is of importance to us, to future generations and for others to know of our culture, our Jewish heritage and history."

118 *"It would mean a lot to Finnish Jews themselves. Knowledge of one's roots. It may also work to strengthen the identity of young Jews."*

The need for a museum was also qualified by recognizing and describing possible future threats as well as current ones. A museum is hoped to solve the problem of losing one's own culture and thus work as a conduit and storage place for the community, as an investment in the future. Many respondents felt that "while the older generation is still alive", it is a pressing matter to record the artefacts and other things associated with Finnish Judaism. Islam represents to some respondents a potential threat or challenge to Jewish culture in Finland. *"The Jewish population diminishes and assimilates, a museum records 'that which is old.'"*

"Parishes are getting smaller, the culture is disappearing. This would be valuable information to our children and grandchildren."

"The legacy of how Jews first came to Finland will be lost to future generations, so the recording of this information is imperative now, while there still is a living generation who remember harder times."

"Jewish history is long and lots of details are lost with the passing generations. Great, wonderful stories remain untold."

"Without a doubt to showcase our history and culture in Finland, especially now that Islam is growing in Finland."

NOT ENOUGH SUBSTANCE?

Even though the majority of respondents felt the founding of a Jewish museum in Finland was warranted, 5% of responses were negative to the issue. All of the people who chose this alternative, felt that the size of the Jewish population in Finland is too small to have their own museum, and that their history here

is too short.⁷ To these respondents, in addition to highlighting the scarcity of the Jewish community, there was a worry and doubt that the museum would in all likelihood not have enough visitors. Strictly speaking, none of the negative respondents denied the need for a museum for themselves or the community, but they viewed the matter strictly from an outsider's point of view.

"The subject matter is too narrow and the population is too small in number. Not a very remarkable immigration with regard to history either."

"In the long run there wouldn't be enough visitors. It is more humiliating to maintain a museum which is devoid of visitors than it is not to have one in the first place."

"In my view our Jewish community is too small to 'justify' a museum."

JEWISH LIFE IN THE MUSEUM

The third part of the survey we sent to the members of the Jewish parishes in Finland dealt with the respondent's views of what kinds of things, artefacts or events the museum might host. Many of the respondents felt that every Jewish home had something that would be suitable for the museum. The approach was very pragmatic, even to the point where one person came forth as a donor to this purely hypothetical museum. In any event, all the responses highlighted the notion that a museum should present everything associated with Finnish Judaism, including old religious traditions, holidays and artefacts as well as normal day-to-day social life in the present time. Even those respondents who were critical of the idea of a museum had plenty of suggestions as to what such a museum might contain.

JEWISH HISTORY AND PRESENT-DAY IN FINLAND AND ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD

Some respondents reported having visited one or more Jewish museum in Europe or elsewhere in the world. It is likely that people who have visited Jewish museums in their lives, even those who didn't make a point of it, have been influenced by them in their thinking and have likely inspired their thoughts as to what a museum of their own might contain. At present, according to the catalogues presented on the State of Israel's science and technology website there are 87 Jewish museums and 62 holocaust museums, of which the majority are to be found in Europe. Some respondents do indeed raise the question why there isn't a Jewish museum in Finland, when almost every other European state does have one.

One wish in particular stood out among the respondents, that of the producing of new knowledge. Based on the facts of history and the present they wished to better the awareness of Judaism among their fellow citizens and by doing so, affect their attitudes towards Jews and Judaism. They wanted to bring forth their role of Jews in the rebuilding of Finland after the wars, as well as the personal histories of Jews who have been and are active in other aspects of life such as science, the arts, politics and sports. In addition to key figures, they also wanted to record the voice, as it were, of ordinary parish members through photographs, interviews, stories and letters. Many respondents would also present the function of the Jewish parish in Finland naturally through their synagogue, the graveyard, their children's day-care, their school and their retirement home.

Naturally, the spiritual core of Jewish beliefs

interwoven with their culture would be strongly represented in the museum, according to the received responses. None of the respondents made any distinction between Jewish culture and Jewish religion, but were seen as parallel elements instead. Thus the gamut of suggestions to the museums contents ran from prayer items associated with the cycle of the seasons and the cycle of life to mundane objects such as pottery, textiles, and events. Many would also be interested in the assorted tools and instruments associated with traditional Jewish trades and crafts. Language issues also surfaced in several responses. In addition, the presenting of Jewish literature, art and music was suggested for the Jewish museum.

"The customs associated with the homes, the raising of children, the teaching of games and the telling of fairytales and stories to the children. The customs and habits associated with school and the learning of trades in different families. The learning of skills over time. The ways of caring for and nurturing the soul and body associated with food and religion. Theories for the planning of one's future, one's vocation, one's mission in life. The facilitation of human relationships across customs, religions and cultures ...".

Only two respondents suggested a separate partition on the holocaust. It was, however, often referred to with the theme "wartime events". I believe the reason for this euphemism can be found in that the respondents don't feel the holocaust should be the defining feature of Judaism, but that it should be shown as a vibrant, rich culture. A memory organisations must be able to deal with the more painful topics as well, as a way to help communities to move past them. Forgetting, in addition to remembering is vital when it comes to the

120 wellbeing of the community, but also the individual.

The history of the State of Israel and the Finnish Jews who were involved with the wars in Israel were seen as an important topic by many, as well as the global topics of Jewish immigration and emigration. Lots of interest was expressed toward topics such as Israelis in Finland, Finns in Israel, the international relations between the states of Israel and Finland, the situation in the Middle-East, all of which were wished to be made seen in the museum. Some comments in the context of conflict in the Middle-East, like *"We're not evil"* and *"We're the same as everyone else"* shows at the same time a worry for the situation in Israel shown by the Finnish Jews as well as a feeling of helplessness. The respondents felt that through a museum of their own they might have an opportunity to deal with these topics. For many, it was an important issue that the information regarding the Middle-East not be partial to any cause, as often is the case in the media, but as impartial as possible. The one key element in the responses was the wish to bring to light that the key value systems of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are in fact all shared, because the respondents felt that Judaism is often portrayed erroneously in relation to these religions.

Many respondents would incorporate in addition to the traditional permanent exhibits the possibility of changing art exhibits, a concert hall, a cinema, an auditorium and an archive. Some respondents even saw the possibility of a Jewish market, where one could purchase items such as kosher foods and drink, Jewish literature, music and art. In fact, many respondents viewed the museum concept as something broader altogether, more of a kind of forum for making the

updating of the community members own knowledge a practical part of daily life.

THE FORMATION OF THE JEWISH MUSEUM

The fourth part of the survey sent to the membership of the parishes of Finnish Jews was intended to find out what kind of museum they would prefer. The actual question was proceed by a short excerpt of museology in the 2010's, of how museums more and more opt for a digital form due to limitations in available spaces, funding difficulties and the accumulation of too many artefacts. Indeed, one question was about how they would view an internet-based museum, or if a more traditional notion of a museum was preferable.

Based on the aforementioned visions and hopes with regard to the museum, it is rather clear that a traditional museum would be more to the memberships liking, or indeed an amalgam of both a physical museum and an internet-based one. The experience and the palpability is what is expressly wanted. Even the few who felt that a digital museum would suffice motivated their answers with financial aspects. It is easy to understand why financial worries would take the fore in small parishes and communities.

"A virtual museum would be very good, because it's not constrained by time and place. Also, the cost of running it could be estimated as much more manageable than with a physical museum."

"Just a virtual museum will do. The costs of a traditional museum can't possibly be met by entry fees alone. An archive of artefacts would have to be maintained as well."

"Even a virtual museum is better than nothing and has a wider range of visitors, but a physical museum is more concrete. I vote for a combination of both."

"A mere virtual museum loses credibility and doesn't afford the same experience as a physical alternative."

"I'm for a traditional museum. Of course things virtual are modern, but logging onto the web is not the same thing. It just doesn't have that sense of interaction and participation."

"I'm more for a traditional museum. We have the delusion these days that virtual life is the same as interacting with real live human beings. A museum only lives if it's physically there. You cannot attain an understanding of the mezuzah or Sabbath just by thinking about them; it's the actual doing that makes the experience come alive when combined with the symbolic."

With regard to the financial aspect and the smallness of the Jewish community, some respondents wrote more extensively on the form which the museum should take. They felt that a Jewish museum would not be prudent, but instead they envisioned a dedicated section at the National Museum or in the buildings of their parishes. Many would also wish that instead of bringing forth just one particular minority group, one could bring forth minorities as a whole and include peoples like Fennoswedes, Same, Tatars, Russians, Estonians and Somali.

I also inquired as to the location of the proposed physical museum. The majority of respondents suggested Helsinki and a number suggested Turku, both of which are natural choices from the aspect of the two largest Jewish parishes. Only a handful suggested it be located by the actual space of worship. This strengthens the view formed by the survey that Finnish Jews would want to tell about themselves, their culture and beliefs to as wide an audience as possible, on the "neutral ground" of a separate museum. The notion of a physically connected museum and parish

was viewed as problematic. From the answers of the parishioners it was clear that the members wish that the artefacts and documents in the care of the parishes were more readily available to them. As is, access to the archives is viewed as complicated; they would prefer not to place a museum in connection to the parishes.

THE POWER OF A MUSEUM

It has long been a custom in Finland, and in the Nordic states in general, that museums are formed up from below through the efforts of the communities themselves and not by government decision. Which begs the interesting question of why the Jewish community hasn't formed a museum, or are there collections of artefacts situated in other museums or have tasks of a museum perhaps been executed in a different manner in the Jewish community?

From the responses to the survey one can deduce that the members of the Jewish parishes would be interested in forming their own museum. The survey also revealed that even if the parishes themselves had collections of heritologian material and objects, access to them is felt at best limited. Even the current collections of the National Archive are viewed as necessary but inadequate by the respondents.

According to Dan Kantor, the representative of the Jewish parish of Helsinki, the reason that the Jews don't have a museum of their own yet is the lack of resources and interest. He says that there has been widespread discussion on the formation of a museum, but that the lack of sufficient funds and an appropriate space have stopped the project from advancing. The Finnish National Archive hosts the Archives of Finnish Jews, Fenno Judaica, to which they

122 are collecting the archives of both parishes and private persons. The Finnish National Museum also hosts some artefacts of Jewish culture. In spite of this, Dan Kantor feels there is room for a museum or their own. He feels that the Jews, being one of the oldest minorities in this country, deserve more attention. There are bound to be causes for the formation of a Jewish museum in the context of cultural diversity today, he says.⁸

Even though Finnish Jews are remarkably well assimilated into Finnish society, they have been very successful at preserving their own culture as well. Surely the central standing of the home, in addition to the common gatherings, has helped keep the traditions alive. To Jews, home is the sanctum, and there they have been able to cherish what is important to them. *"The home has had a larger impact on the preservation of Judaism than the synagogue or the school"*. (Kantor, London, Muir 2006: 35) It is regrettable that it is the effective assimilation of Finnish Jews, the slow distancing from the traditions that has led to the gradual decline of Jewish culture, which is becoming visible in the current interest in cultural heritage and the keeping and preservation thereof. Against this backdrop it may become understandable why the Jews haven't formed a museum. A factor may also be the fear that a museum might attract too much attention and cause problems. Some respondents did raise the question of anti-Semitism and the havoc that may bring. They suspect that if the Finnish Jews had their own museum, that it would be potentially vandalized in various ways.

I think there's plenty of space for museums on (religious) minorities in the heritological field of our country. A Jewish museum either as an independent body or as a part of some other museum would open up Judaism to society as a whole, as well as function as a kind

of showcase for Finnish Judaism even to international interest groups. It is worth mentioning, however, that Finland currently hosts over 1100 museums, of which about 330 are professionally maintained. These days founding a museum doesn't simply mean collecting old objects, but it places the demands of scientific documentation, thorough planning of exhibits and constant professional care. The Jewish community in Finland is undeniably small in membership, and it would be entirely exorbitant to assume that the Jewish parishes themselves would have the necessary means and resources to implement the founding, let alone upkeep, of a proper museum.

The Museum of Cultures at the Tennis Palace in Helsinki studies and presents the peoples and cultures of the world and records their cultural heritage. The museum's collection and research focuses on the documenting of today's cultural phenomena. Collections of general ethnography and Finno-Ugric items form the core of the Museum of Cultures.⁹ To this day the Museum of Cultures has focused on presenting mainly foreign cultures.¹⁰ The exhibitions are described as *"...opening points of view into past and present events and the customs of people around the world, even in diverse Finland."*

The Museum of Cultures already has some Jewish artefacts in its possession. Could there be a possibility that the Museum of Cultures pay closer heed to minority groups more close to home, who cannot record and present their own cultural heritage by their own efforts due to limited resources? Could the Museum of Cultures, a division of the Finnish National Museum, become the future records keeper and presenter of Finnish Jewish cultural heritage?

Finland is a diverse society to which different minorities have brought their own richness during the centuries. The increase in globalisation in recent decades continues to bring more ethnic groups to our country, which all plays their part in forming our society today. In a pluralistic society the understanding of marginal and ethnic groups is imperative to achieving a common balance.

Even though there is constant public debate as to the financial structures, visitor amounts and the tightening of government allocated funds for the museums, you cannot measure the necessity of the existence of museums and the need of founding new ones by these factors alone. The existent need for a museum doesn't go away simply because the resources for founding and maintaining it aren't there. The human need of practicing, recording and cherishing one's own culture are some of the deepest facets of humanity itself.

NOTES

1. Email correspondence with the representative of the Jewish parish in Helsinki, Dan Kantor, 5th of April 2011. Material in author's custody. According to Kantor, Helsinki has approximately 1150 members and Turku 160 members. He estimates the total number of Jews in Finland to be approximately 1600-1700 persons.
2. Hufvudstadsbladet 27.10.2010, Dagens figur.
3. Permanent Finnish residents, members of the Helsinki parish, gender distribution 2011: Under 20 F: 119 M: 123
21-30 F:55 M:78
31-40 F:50 M:62
41-50 F:73 M:72
51-60 F:69 M:69
61-70 F:78 M:68
over 70 F:67 M:59

Women combined: 511, Men combined 408
Memorandum of the Helsinki Jewish parish
13.5.2011, material in author's custody.

Gender distribution of Turku parish is unknown.

4. Permanent Finnish residents, members of the Helsinki parish, age distribution 2011:
Under 20 years, total 242
21-30 years, total 133
31-40 years, total 112
41-50 years, total 145
51-60 years, total 138
61-70 years, total 146
over 70 years, total 126
Memorandum of the Helsinki Jewish parish
13.5.2011, material in author's custody.
Age distribution of Turku parish is unknown.
5. It is possible that the survey didn't reach the younger members. The survey was publicized only through email and the parish newsletter, not through schools or interest groups.
6. In November of 1942, the Finnish National Police, Valpo, The Finnish Security Police, handed over eight Jewish refugees to German forces, who were then sent to concentration camps in Poland. 14.4.2011 http://fennojudaica.jchelsinki.fi/fi_his_holocaust.html
7. With the onset of postmodernism in cultural politics there has been a more open view of diversity of culture. Tolerance has increased and marginal cultures and minority groups have gotten more visibility. In the name of equality it has been deemed that minorities have the same rights as the majority.
8. Interview with Dan Kantor 23.3.2010. Material in author's custody.
9. According to the Director of the Museum of Cultures, Eija-Maija Kotilainen: *"The task of the Museum of Cultures is to present peoples from outside of Europe and also the Finno-Ugric peoples."* Email correspondence 12.5.2011, material in author's custody.

10. Director of the Museum of Cultures, Eija-Maija Kotilainen 12.5.2011: *"In some exhibitions ie. Call of the Minaret, Finnish minorities have also been represented, in this case Muslim (and Tatar). We have also hosted a few exhibitions on same culture."* Email correspondence 12.5.2011, material in author's custody.

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Survey to the members of the Jewish parishes in Finland, spring 2011.

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