



International Workshop

Heritage as Habitat: Building Communities through Jewish Cultural Heritage

March 4-6, 2026, Helsinki & Turku, Finland

This workshop examines how Jewish cultural heritage functions as a generative force for communities – at the municipal level, in civic life, and within scholarly networks – and how those communities in turn shape practices of memory, identity, and transmission. Moving beyond heritage as a static artifact, we approach it as a set of social processes that sustain relations: neighborhood associations and commemorative landscapes; museums, archives, and digital platforms; academic collaborations and transnational networks. Through interdisciplinary case studies and comparative perspectives, participants will explore how heritage-based communities foster resilience by enabling social cohesion, intergenerational knowledge transfer, civic participation, and cultural recovery after trauma. At the same time, the workshop attends to more challenging dynamics – vulnerability, exclusion, contestation, and erasure – showing how power, policy, and discourse can instrumentalize memory and weaken communal bonds. Methodologically, it invites historical, ethnographic, archival, and participatory approaches, and encourages dialogue between practitioners, policymakers, and academics. Intended outcomes include a short position statement, policy briefs for local stakeholders, and a special-issue proposal.





Programme

March 3 (Helsinki)

Arrival

March 4 (Helsinki)

9:00 – 10:00 Meeting local Jewish communities at the Jewish Community of Helsinki

10:30 – 12:00 Meeting with local organizations (National Archives; Finnish National Agency of Education) at the Jewish Community of Helsinki

Themes for informal discussion:

- Defining heritage: whose voices, whose silences
- Heritage hierarchies and risks of exclusion
- Heritage in crisis: resilience, vulnerability, conflict
- Knowledge transfer and intergenerational connections

12:00 *Lunch*

14:35 Train to Turku

16:39 Arrival at Turku and Check in at Hotel

18:00 – 19:30 Public Keynote Lecture: “Yiddish Cultural Heritage in Finland: Rediscovery, Research, and Revival” by Simo Muir, moderated by Mercedesz Czimbalo (Turku)

19:30 *Reception*



Workshop Day 1 – March 5 (Turku)

9:00 – 9:20 *Gathering & Coffee*

9:20 – 9:30 **Welcoming Remarks** by Mercedesz Czimbalmos & Sarah Ross

9:30 – 9:40 **Welcoming Remarks** by Åbo Akademi, the Inez and Julius Polin Institute for Theological Research and Institutum Judaicum Aboense by Pekka Lindqvist

9:45 – 10:15 **Opening Impulse**

- "Living Landscapes: Jewish Heritage between Memory and Making in Northern Europe" by Sarah Ross

10:15 – 11:15 **Session I: Whose Heritage Matters?**

Session Impulse by Dalya Markovich

- Competing definitions and voices
- Inclusion/exclusion
- Hierarchies of heritage

11:15 – 11:45 *Coffee Break*

11:45 – 13:00 **Session II: Heritage, Resilience, and Vulnerability**

Session Impulse by Cordula Dittmer & Daniel Lorenz

- Heritage as resource vs. heritage as conflict
- Heritage in times of crisis: resilience and recovery
- Risks of instrumentalization

13:00 – 14:30 *Lunch*

14:30 – 15:45 **Session III: Practitioners & Policy Perspectives**

Session Impulse by Mercedesz Czimbalmos

- Civic participation and municipal perspectives
- How communities sustain cohesion and transmit knowledge

15:45 – 16:00 *Coffee Break*

16:00 – 17:15 **Debate & Reflection**

Moderation by Anthony Kauders

- Linking themes from the day
- Key tensions and questions to carry forward



Workshop Day 2 – March 6 (Turku)

9:00 – 9:30 *Coffee & Informal Gathering*

9:30 – 11:00 **Session IV: Methodologies for Effective Heritage Work**

Session Impulse by Ruth Illman

- Academic, practitioner, and policy approaches
- Contextual and digital methods

11:00 – 11:15 *Coffee Break*

11:15 – 12:45 **Session V: Heritage in the Making: Activism in German Jewish Communities**

Session Impulse by Thorsten Fehlberg

- Constructing and negotiating Jewish identity
- Post-Soviet reality and religious practice

12:45 – 14:15 *Lunch*

14:15 – 15:45 **Collaborative Working Session**

Moderation by Miriam Attias

- Drafting principles for inclusive, resilient heritage communities
- Beginning work on policy recommendations
- Developing shared frameworks for “heritage as habitat”

15:45 – 16:00 *Coffee Break*

16:00 – 17:30 **Synthesis & Output Planning**

Moderation by Tom Kellner & Sascha Wegner

- Drafting position statement and identifying next steps (policy briefs, special issue)
- Conclusions, closing remarks
- Identifying strengths and vulnerabilities in current practices

18:30 – 20:30 *Informal dinner / networking gathering*

March 7

Departure



Keynote Simo Muir (Abstract):

Yiddish Cultural Heritage in Finland: Rediscovery, Research, and Revival

By the late twentieth century, the Yiddish language and Yiddish-speaking culture appeared to have almost entirely vanished from Finland. Within the Jewish community of Helsinki, the Jewish Choir Association was the sole institution that continued to preserve Yiddish cultural heritage, primarily through song. The decline of Yiddish language and culture in Finland was the result of multiple factors: a strong tendency towards linguistic assimilation into the majority population; the prioritisation of modern Hebrew language and culture; and the loss of connection to Eastern European Yiddish-speaking cultural centres following the Holocaust. From a research perspective, an additional challenge was that the Yiddish cultural heritage had not been documented in the Finnish Jewish Archives that was deposited to the National Archives in the mid 1990s.

A discovery made in 2005 in the basement of a building formerly owned by the Jewish community in central Helsinki marked a turning point in the understanding of Yiddish cultural heritage in Finland. In a long-forgotten archive room, a substantial collection of Yiddish-language revues, plays, songs, and poems written by Helsinki-born Jac Weinstein (1883–1976) was uncovered. This material significantly altered prevailing perceptions of the role of Yiddish language and culture within the Jewish community of Helsinki, and more broadly, of communal life. The texts, written for the Jewish Drama Society in Helsinki (est. 1922), brought to light themes that were silenced in other contexts—such as the impact of the war-time awareness of the Holocaust on the community, and how, in the post-war period, the community commemorated the destroyed Jewish communities.



The discovery of such material also sparked interest in its re-performance and in raising public awareness of it. I was personally afforded the opportunity to pursue this during a research project at the University of Leeds (2015–2017), within which texts by Jac Weinstein were performed at international festivals in England, the Czech Republic, the United States, South Africa, and Australia. In 2022, the Helsinki-based association Idishe Vort (est. 2000) produced a Yiddish-language CD titled “Helsinki Yiddish Cabaret”, featuring songs by Jac Weinstein. The project was realised in collaboration with musicians from Helsinki, Berlin, and New York.

This presentation aims to reassess the perceived vanishing of Yiddish language and culture in Finland by examining newly uncovered archival material. It highlights the significance of Jac Weinstein’s Yiddish-language texts in reshaping understandings of Jewish communal life in Helsinki, particularly in relation to Holocaust memory and cultural continuity. The presentation also explores how these discoveries have inspired new performances and public engagement. In the broader Jewish world, performances showcasing Yiddish cultural heritage from Helsinki have been received with enthusiasm. But how does the local community in Finland perceive it? Ultimately, whose cultural heritage is it?