

Formal and Cultural Readings of a Vanished Community

Explorations of the Jewish district of Łódź

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Abstract: This research examines the spatial development of the Jewish district in 19th century Łódź and the everyday use of the urban space by its Jewish inhabitants. The question posed is: How was the development of the Jewish district related to its residents' identity? Based on claims of urban morphologists that urban form expresses the history of previously occupying communities, our goal was to find "past ghosts" of the Jewish community in maps of the Jewish district. The district's formal and typological developments were analyzed, with additional information from literature and archival material, such as photographs, documents, private diaries, newspapers and prose.

Findings show no formal evidence of Jewish identity associated with the district, which suggests that morphological survey alone could not yield Jewish spatial practices. In order to comprehend the Jewish district of Łódź, one must understand the industrial town's history, factors leading to its establishment, Jewish migration to Łódź, the attitude of Jews to urban space and to life in Poland vs. The Holy Land, and positions of other residents and city authorities to Jewish inhabitants. The paper relates to current topics, of relevance today, of national identity and its embodiment in everyday urban life.

1. Introduction

During 19th and early 20th centuries the second largest Jewish community in Congress Poland lived in Łódź and contributed greatly to the city's physical, economic and cultural development. Despite many studies of Łódź as an Eastern European industrial town and studies of its rich Jewish heritage, only limited scholarship dealt with the formal characteristics of the Jewish district of Łódź. This paper employs urban design and architectural knowledge, augmented by cultural data, to examine the relationship between Łódź and its Jewish inhabitants.

Destruction of a large part of the Jewish district during WWII and later under communist rule raises questions about a vanishing community and a non-existing place and how one may trace a lost community through the urban form in which it once lived. To answer this question, the study adopts urban morphology methodology, thus, revealing another layer of Łódź's Jewish space.

The development of Łódź's Jewish district is examined in two periods: (1) first half of the 19th century, when the district was practically a Ghetto (Pinkas Hakehillot, 1976¹; Dynner, 2015), and (2) the turn of the century, when it served as the core of a wider Jewish inhabitation (Puś, 1998). Within these periods the study explores the urban form and its everyday use through morphological and cultural readings.

2. Methodology

The study leans upon historical, spatial and cultural sources enabling an analysis of urban processes in 19th century Łódź through the interaction between urban form and everyday life. The study is based on previous literature, formal material as maps and official documents, and cultural material as photographs, memoirs, periodicals, fiction and poetry.

Conzen (1981) suggested that the city represents a socio-geographical locale with distinct urban lifestyle. The local community is embedded in a place, which is influenced by the community's characteristics. The city is a collection of material forms projecting the demands, aspirations, ideas and "personality" of that "local society". These material forms offer a view not only of the everyday environment, but also of the evolutionary evidences of urban society throughout history. However, urban society, urban life and urban landscape create uniformity in space, despite of, or due to, constant tension between society and its environment (*ibid.*). According to this view of the city as an archive (Malfroy, 2004), urban morphology may distinguish and diagnose local patterns of development and processes of change (Vance, 1990).

Documents concerning the Jewish community (APŁ) draw light on Jewish daily life, through administration lists and correspondence with the authorities and other Jewish communities. Jewish press provides information of Jews in Poland in general and in Łódź in particular, exhibiting Jewish urban issues as hygiene, rabbinic elections, Jewish workers' conditions, etc. Prose, memoirs and personal writings serve mainly to understand Łódź's Jewish background. However, as many Jews were hard laborers, personal writings are scarce (Pinkas Hakehillot, 1976).

3. Analysis/Results

Attention to the Jewish district by the authorities was mainly through restrictions of Jewish inhabitation. The area was neither walled² nor limited for Jews only, and Christians lived there as well (Pinkas Hakehillot, 1976). Though the Old Town underwent some renewal in 1823 (Badziak, 2009), maps of Łódź before 1841 do not indicate it. In fact, the Old Town does not appear in Łódź's general maps before 1849³.

At its first 20 years, the Jewish district was composed of only three streets: Wolborska, Podrzeczna and Rynek (market square)⁴, inhabiting 342 people in 1825 and 1,359 people in 1841. After its expansion in 1841 Jewish residents were given the permission to inhabit three more streets: Drown-

1. Pinkas Hakehillot (community book) is an enterprise conducted by Dr. Shmuel Spector and published by Yad Vashem. The books amalgamate records of European and North African Jewish communities, which have perished during the holocaust. The records, collected by researchers and historians, depict the Jewish community's history at three periods: early settlement to WWI, interwar period and WWII and later (the information was extracted from Yad Vashem website).

2. The Old and New parts of town were separated by the Łódka River, serving as a natural border.

3. Manual drawing of the industrial city of Łódź, by Józef Lenartowski, 1849. Source: Łódź na mapach.

4. Plan of the old town in Łódź with areas designated for Jewish settlement, 1841. Source: APŁ PL_39_609_516.

owska, part of Kościelna and Stodolna⁵, increasing the district's population to 3,050 persons in 1857. In 1859 a new planned section added four new streets; Jerozalińska, Aleksandryjska, Jakuba and Franciszkańska.⁶ Three years later, in 1862, the year of the Jewish restriction law termination, the total population amounted to 5,380 people.⁷ Overcrowding in the district was augmented by storage of goods and temporary housing for occasional merchants (Pinkas Hakehillot, 1976).

The Jewish district's overcrowding led to the erection of the "Jewish" village Bałuty in the late 1850s, in Radogoszcz Province, north of the delineated Jewish district. Bałuty resided outside of Łódź's administrative legislation, allowing a somewhat unrestricted Jewish inhabitation (Pinkas Hakehillot, 1976). The Jewish character of Bałuty and its annexation to Łódź in 1915 caused the Old Town to be considered morphologically Jewish (Hanzl, 2012).

The area defined for the examination of the Jewish district in this study was based on the definition of the authorities for the Jewish district as extracted from two maps drawn for this purpose in 1841⁸ and 1859⁹ (Figure 1). The morphological examination takes after Koter's study of Łódź's city center (2009) but additionally looks for Jewish signs within the urban fabric. The plots examined are the initial plots constituting the Jewish district (institutive phase) and the plots added in 1859. Adaptive and transformative changes are based on the examination of initial plots and their ratio of built and un-built area. Building types and usage are compared with Koter's findings of the city center at parallel periods. The center and margins of the district in general and of each plot in particular were also examined.

The examination leaned on 6 maps in which the Jewish district appears: 1841, 1873, 1877, 1889, 1894 and 1917.¹⁰ The district was divided to 14 blocks excluding 5 blocks (C,E,G,M,N) which were either not limited by streets, or were settled in a later period and scarcely (Figure 2).

Categories for the blocks' examination:

1. Number of plots – change in number of plots, divided or united, as an index for development or lack of development.
2. Number of fields and their area (% of blocks' area) – fields usually indicate of rural areas. In Łódź, fields were used by artisans for growing raw material for the textile industry.
3. Number of buildings and their land cover (% of blocks' area) – filling of plots as an index for development.
4. Wood and Brick buildings in correspondence with the significance given to their presentation in town maps.

In addition, each block was studied morphologically and in comparison to other blocks of the district and general features were examined: borders, linkage to town, center and fringes and the connection between planning and actual development.

Block A is important for understanding the Łódka River as the district's borders. Along

5. *Ibid.*

6. Jewish district expansion project at the Old Town in Lodz, 1859. Source: APŁ PL_39_609_608.

7. Information regarding number of inhabitants in the Jewish district was taken from Pinkas Hakehillot.

8. Plan of the old town in Łódź with areas designated for Jewish settlement, 1841. Source: APŁ PL_39_609_516.

9. Jewish district expansion project at the Old Town in Lodz, 1859. Source: APŁ PL_39_609_608.

10. Plan of the old town in Łódź with areas designated for Jewish settlement, 1841. Source: APŁ PL_39_609_516; Situational plan of the city of Łódź – early settlement and city expansion up to 1873. Source: APŁ PL_39_609_525; Plan of the property of his highness the Baron Karl Schejbler – with the surrounding city of Łódź, 1877. Source: APŁ PL_39_609_527; Plan of the city of Łódź with eminent factories and railroad, 1889. Source: APŁ PL_39_609_530_I-IV; Plan of the city of Łódź, in Piotrkow province, 1894-1896 (1906-1908) (1897). Source: APŁ website; Plan of the city of Łódź before 1914. Source: APŁ website.

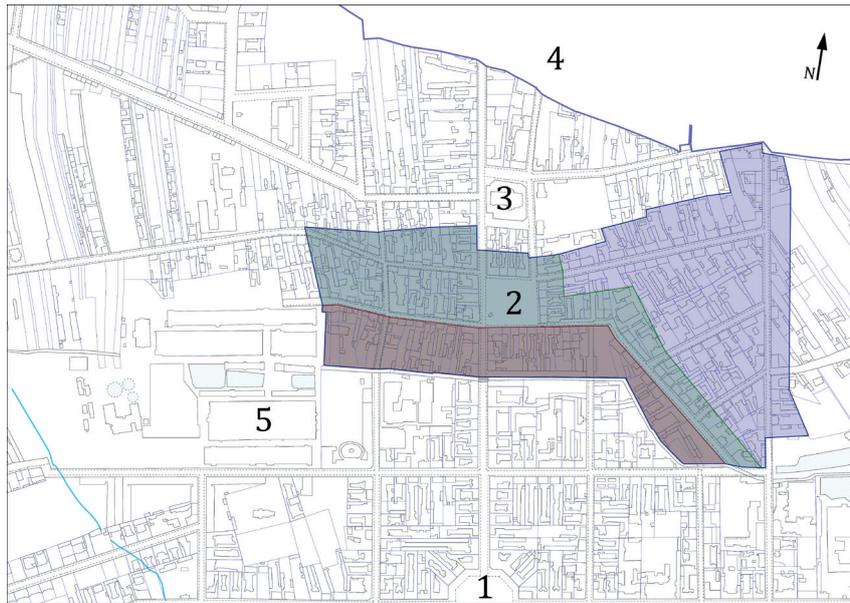


Figure 1. Location and development of the Jewish district. 1. New Town market square, 2. Old Town market square, 3. Catholic Church, 4. Baluty at Radogoszcz District (until its annexation to Łódź in 1915), 5. Poznański's estate. Red – Jewish district until 1841, Green – Jewish district until 1859, Blue – Jewish district until 1862 (when freed by the Russian Tsar).

the years, even when the river was narrowed, block A had only its northern facade built. The block's plots are longitudinal. Despite the inability to fully examine the block in 1841 due to its partialness, it is evident that the land cover was relatively high. Of the visible area, buildings covered 22% of the area while fields covered 46%. In the same year, most of the buildings face the market square. In most plots 2-4 buildings are built. In 1841 there were no brick buildings in block A. In 1873, out of 60 buildings in the block, 26% were brick built, covering 37.7% of the area. In 1894 the number of brick buildings rose but their percentage of block's area stayed almost the same (39%). Until 1894, when the whole block was heavily developed, most of the brick buildings were concentrated near the market square. Fields are visible in this block in 1873, 1877 and even 1894. The fields are located far from the market square. Number of plots in this block grew along the years: until 1894 plots transformation occurred at the peripheral part (south-east). In 1894 an internal division is seen in the western part. This division might have occurred due to the river narrowing and the laying of a street at the blocks' southern facade.

Block B also faces the river, thus, its southern facade was not built. Though being one of the first blocks of the Jewish district, and its proximity to the market square, its morphology attest of a rural character; in 1841, 10 plots, containing only fields covered over 70% of the block's area. Throughout most of the years the block's buildings faced the main streets, Podrzeczna and Nowomiejska and the corner of the market square. Excluding some plots, most of the block's plots are longitudinal. Out of 34 buildings in the block, only one, at the corner of the market square, was built of bricks. In 1873 the block had turned more urban with only one plot serving as a field. However, 80% of the block's 49 buildings were built of wood. Along the years, transformation from wood to brick and land cover of buildings were relatively low; in 1894 brick buildings covered 23% of the block's area and wooden buildings covered 18.3%. Most of the brick buildings faced Nowomiejska, the street leading to the New Town. As opposed to block A, the southern

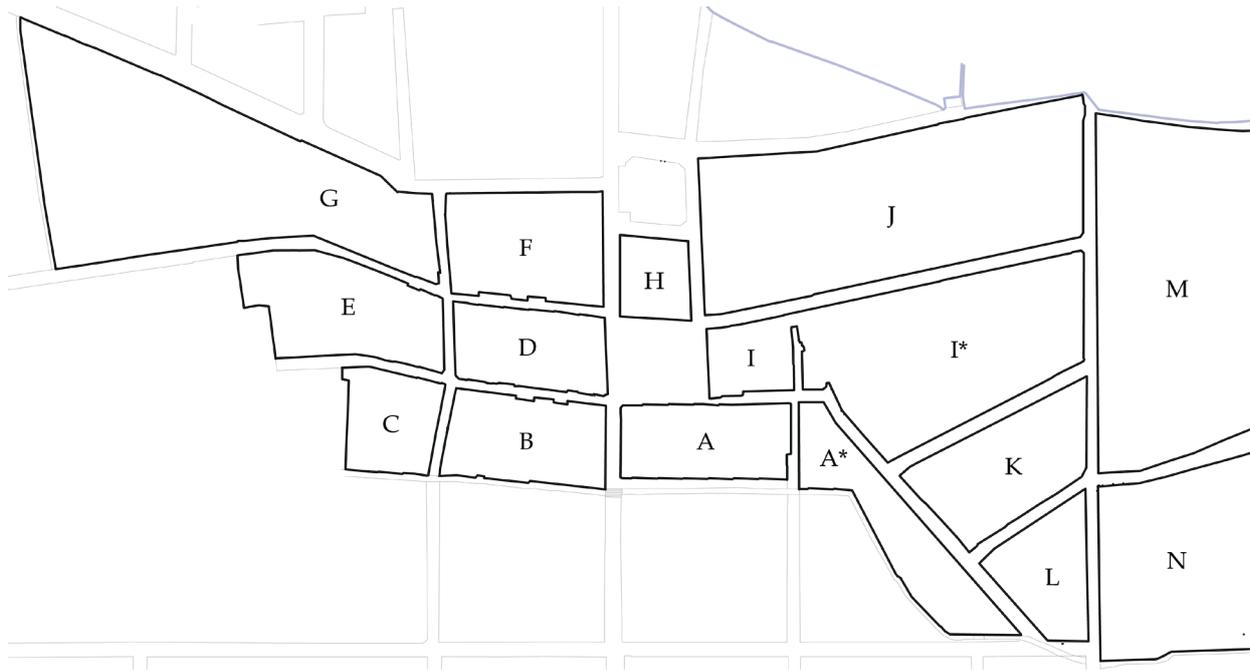


Figure 2. Defined blocks for analysis.

facade of block B was not developed. That might be due to the presence of Poznanski's estate at the southern side of the river.

Block D was the only block designated wholly for Jews in 1841. In this year, its eastern facade, despite its bordering the market square was not built. A peripheral block pattern (Carmona et al, 2003) is seen; buildings face the main streets, and the inner part of the block is quite empty. Despite its centric location, the block is mostly rural; plots of fields conceive 68% of the block's area. However, after 1873 fields gradually disappeared. From one brick building in 1841, along the years the peripheral wooden structures transformed into brick buildings with auxiliary wooden buildings at the back. In this block, the number of plots dropped along the years, due to their merging.

Block F's southern side was designated for Jewish living in 1841. A clear direction of the block's buildings is seen in 1841, facing the corner of the market square. A significant incline of land cover is evident between 1889 and 1894 from 31% to 47%. During these years, a switch was made between wooden and brick buildings' cover, from 32% brick buildings and 68% wooden buildings in 1889 to 60% brick buildings and 40% wooden buildings in 1894. A massive incline in the number of plots is seen in the 1870's and 1880's and a massive decline in the 1890's.

Block H's southern side was also designated for Jewish living in 1841. Land cover of buildings in block H is the highest of all blocks and developed mostly between 1841 and 1873. In 1841 the Jewish side of the block was hardly built, despite its proximity to the market square. In 1873, this facade was filled mostly with brick buildings, as opposed to mostly wooden buildings in the north part. It seems that after the massive development between 1841 and 1873, the block was not significantly developed.

In the plan for enlarging the Jewish district in 1859, new blocks (I, J, K & L) and streets were added between the Łódka River (or Północna st. and Brzezinska st. A significant development of these blocks is evident only in 1894. In block I, in 1873, the buildings' land cover was 12% and gradually went up until a significant rise of 40% land cover in 1894. Another rise to 48% is seen in 1917. Brick buildings' percentage rose significantly from 45% in 1873 to 75% in 1894. In 1873

there were two fields in the block and in 1877 their number rose to 8. In the following years, the fields disappeared from this block.

A large part of block J belonged to the Catholic Church. Filling of empty plots is evident only in 1894. In this block number of fields also grew along the years.

Blocks K and L's borders are diagonal due to their location between the diagonal Wolborska st. and straight Franciszkanska st. In block K the plots were divided to smaller plots along the years. The massive development faces Wolborska st. which leads to the market square and the synagogue. Brick buildings' land cover in block K was relatively high, approximately 44% in 1873, but kept a moderate development until reaching 60% in 1894. In this block, fields existed until 1917. In block L a significant development occurred in later years, with a slight decline between 1894 and 1917.

The new area allocated for Jews in 1859 seems to be slowly settled until mid 1890's. Furthermore, though the pond of Łódka River was reduced to a narrow river in the late 1870's, houses on both sides of the river reached its banks only 20 years later (Figure 3).

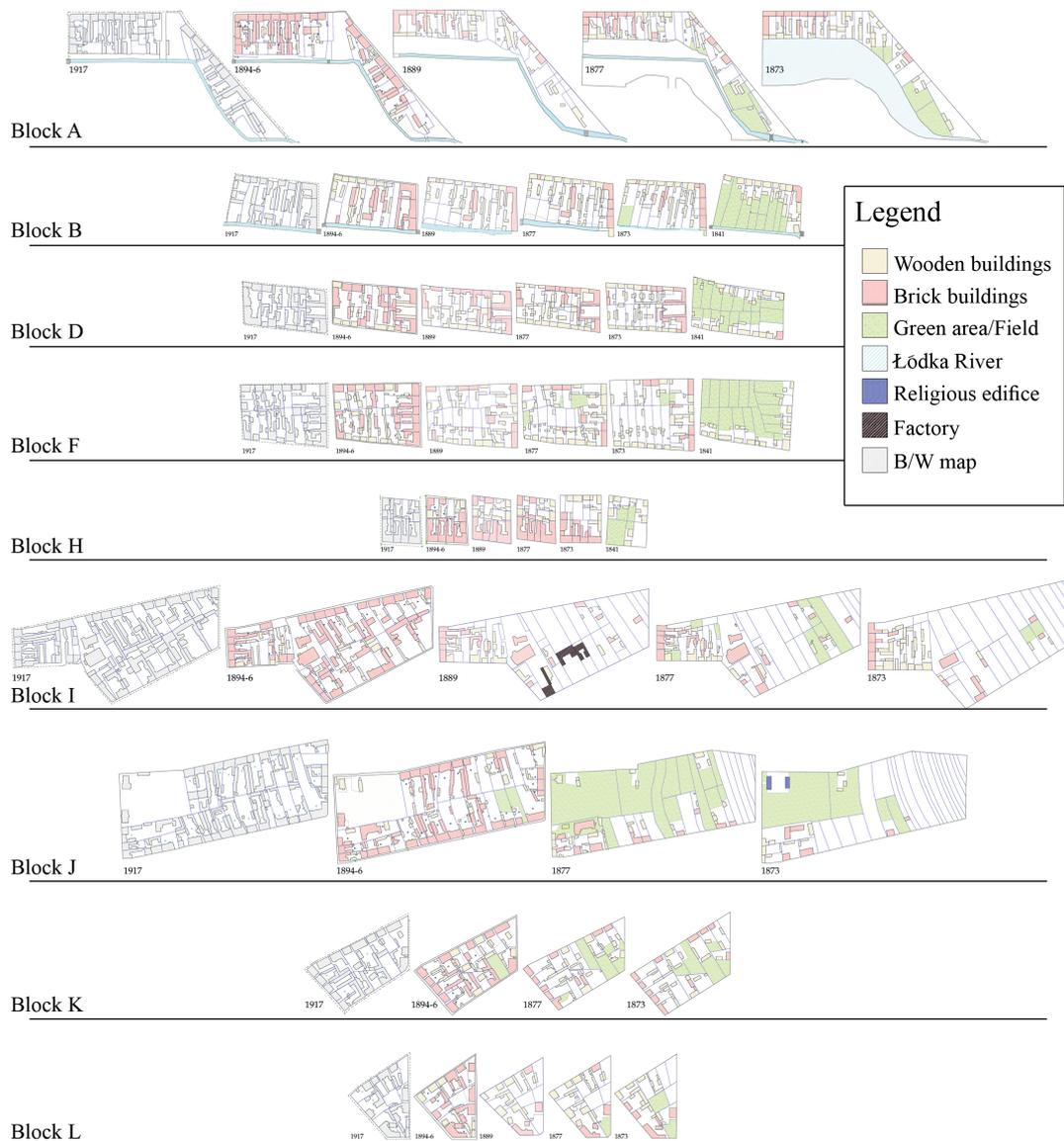


Figure 3. Chronological examination of blocks.

Transverse examination – In 1841 a peripheral development is seen in most blocks. The buildings are explicitly facing main streets. Nevertheless, despite the market square's centrality, two of the facades facing it are empty in 1841. As of 1873, a clear difference is seen, in each block, between the facade facing the market square and the rest of the block.

Chronological examination – A massive development is seen in a period of less than 80 years. Between 1841 and 1873 the number of buildings in the district rose from 101 to 369. This period seems to be the pick of development. Between 1873 and 1877 building's land cover rose by 4% in four years alone. In 1894 another leap is evident, when number of buildings dropped but their land cover rose by 4%. At that year, massive construction has been portrayed across the whole town (Koter, 1990).

Buildings type – Assuming all houses in town were built by the same builders, Markowski (2007) argues that the differences between Jewish and Christian houses lie in their purpose, which in turn influences their shape. Nonetheless, a comparison of building plans in the Jewish district with buildings in the New Town shows similarity. The only difference in plans from the 1820s was in the specification of a working room in plans for houses in the New Town, as opposed to a general definition of rooms in the Jewish district. In later periods, houses in the Jewish district differ slightly in size from buildings in the New Town. Nevertheless, tenement houses, dominant in Łódź at the second half of the 19th century, were introduced also into the Jewish district.

Presence of Jewish edifices attests to the concentration of Jewish residents and the use of the public space for communal needs. However, the morphological examination indicates that Jewish public edifices are almost absent from the Jewish district's maps. The prominent religious structure is a Catholic Church, distinctly marked as a religious building, whereas the synagogue appears in maps as yet another brick structure. The first (and only) designated synagogue was erected in the Jewish district between 1859 and 1871, when the first improvised synagogue was forbidden for use due to dilapidated condition (Pinkas Hakehillot, 1976). Other synagogues were built outside the district's borders, after freed from the confinement to the district.

Lack of agricultural fields in the Jewish district during its confinement years, and even later, is puzzling. The initial plan of Łódź's New Town was made of agricultural plots for growing cotton or linen, with houses serving also as workshops, at each plot (Gutkind, 1972; Popławska & Muthesius, 1986). From 1873 there is a difference between green areas in the New Town and the Jewish district. The difference of presence of fields might indicate a different occupational structure for Jews, incorporated into the industrial town for commerce rather than for industry.

Morphological examination shows differences between the urban fabric of the Jewish district and that of the New Town. However, most of these differences are explained by the location of the Jewish district in the Old Town¹¹ and the overcrowding caused by the confinement of many inhabitants into a small living area for 40 years. Moreover, historical literature refers to the Jewish district as the "other" space in the industrial town (Friedman, 1935; Pinkas Hakehillot, 1976; Hanzl, 2012). It is the cultural examination that reveals the Jewish spirit of the district.

Layers of cultural use of the urban space reveal the life of a traditional community in a developing industrial town. They express the community's success in integrating into the modern town, despite difficulties in keeping its religion and rituals. They also clearly indicate the opportunities Łódź provided its Jewish community, how Jews themselves perceived life in a town turning in-

11. The streets system in the Jewish district stayed almost the same as it was in middle ages. Replacement of wooden houses with brick structures was part of the condition put on Jews settling in the district (Pinkas Hakehillot, 1976). However, the district's map of 1841 shows only two brick houses.

dustrial, and the sense of ownership they felt towards the town. An article in a Jewish newspaper at the beginning of the 20th century refers to a derogatory question asked by the Piotrkowian periodical *Tydzien*: “To whom Łódź belongs?”. As the Jewish newspaper reports, the *Tydzien*'s article indicates real-estate values and industry ownership, claiming that most of them belong to Jews. It states: “...we have not checked these numbers, and even if they do not exaggerate...our brothers purchased their homes not with fraud and theft, but with hard work and great capital”. As the reporter proudly concludes: “...well, now the statistics prove it all! – Łódź belongs to the Jews...”¹² Owning the city was not a false whim. At the end of the 19th century and beginning of 20th century, a large amount of real-estate was owned by Jews in Łódź, as may be seen in Puś's (1998) statistics.

Documents show that maintaining the borders of the Jewish district was a matter of day to day use. Most Jews were confined to the district, but not all; few wealthy Jewish families were allowed to live in the New Town (Pinkas Hakehillot, 1976). A document found in APL, shows Adolf Landau's request from 1853 to transfer his factory from the Jewish district to the New Town.¹³ Another document from 1858 portrays the Parish's priest complaints against Jewish houses standing too close to the Catholic Church. The priest calls for the enforcement of the district's law in order to avoid Jewish residencies' noise from disturbing public services.¹⁴ The complaint is accompanied by a map showing the distance of Jewish dwellings from church.¹⁵ These documents indicate the permeating nature of the border and the negotiation it involved.

A set of photographs, taken during WWI¹⁶ let us perceive what is beyond architectural and urban structure, indicating the condition and use of the urban space. A photograph titled “A view of the small Market in Łódź”¹⁷ attest of the poor physical condition of the district. A photograph taken from the market square towards Nowomiejska st.¹⁸ shows three different languages on shops' signs; Polish, Russian and Yiddish, attesting of the various shoppers visiting the shops. Another photograph of a wealthier area shows a gentlemen clothing shop in a commercial street in Łódź (Figure 4). The garments and accessories in the shop are modern, but on a closer look one notices a stand of Jewish prayer shawls in the lower right corner of the photograph. If it was not for the stand of shawls, one would not connect the area to Jewish inhabitation.

Photographs teach us of the public space. Use of domestic and semi-public space is hard to extract from maps and photographs. Those places are portrayed in prose and newspapers; articles deliberate the small amount of Jewish workers in mechanized factories,¹⁹ as opposed to Jewish domestic labor and contracted work.²⁰ A main reason for that is preserving the Shabbat. Some of the workshops employed more than family members or tenants and grew larger along the years. Alongside domestic workshops was the operation of semi-private prayer houses. A prayer house would operate in a private place and include around 30 followers of a rabbi, or a community with shared interests. At certain points these prayer houses competed with the only synagogue existing in the Jewish district (Walicki, 2000).

12. (29.1.1903). לארשי תוצופתב. ונצראב. הרפצה. 2 מע' translated from Hebrew by the author. Source: <http://web.nli.org.il/sites/jpress>.

13. APL, (1858-1860), Akta miasta Łodzi, sygn 101, p. 237-245.

14. APL, file 101 “permits granted to Jews for living outside of the district”, p. 10-11.

15. situational plan of the church's square showing the distance of orthodox Jews' homes from church, 1858. According to source: APL, file 101 “permits granted to Jews for living outside of the district”, p. 16.

16. The use of photographs from the period of WWI exceeds the research's timeline, however, lack of photographs taken of the Jewish district and the specific attention given to the Jewish district and its Jewish residents in this unique set of photographs had brought for the decision to use the photographs as auxiliary material.

17. Source: ŻIH.Ł 1017 Inne: 155, F-1132.

18. Nowomiejska st. Old houses from 1820, 1912. Source: APL 39_606_0_Ł-L_4-N-9.

19. 6.9.1911, טייהראָו איד, p. 4 Source: <http://web.nli.org.il/sites/jpress>.

20. דיגמה. בשומה ׁווחתמ. 25.1.1900. יבצ-ׁב. 5 מע' Source: <http://web.nli.org.il/sites/jpress>.



Figure 4. Jews in front of their stalls in Łódź, before 1918. Source: ŻIH.L 1034 Inne: I-163, F-1140.

4. Discussion/Conclusion

When considering the Jewish district of Łódź, “the archive” is almost gone. Urban form and its everyday use had to be supported by auxiliary documents, such as photographs, memoirs, periodicals, fiction and poetry. However, rather than supplementing urban and architectural documents, the cultural layer is integral to the formal one, supporting Whitehand’s (1981) claim that history contributes to urban study.

Supported by historical and political background, this research sheds light on a vanishing community and the place where it once lived. The morphological examination shows that despite a cultural difference between Jews and Christians in Łódź, dwelling types were quite similar. A cultural reading provides explanation of Jewish inhabitants’ customs, attire, language and daily routine. The transformation of the Jewish district from ghetto to ethnic enclave after the culmination of the Jewish restriction laws is evident in maps of the restricted area and in documents regarding Jewish settlement in ex-district areas. Puś’s (1998) account of real-estate held by Jews shows that it is centralized mostly in and around the initial Jewish district. The number of prayer houses in the district at the turn of the century,²¹ and the large synagogue also show concentration of Jewish inhabitants in the district.

A previous study (Hanzl, 2012) refers to the Jewish district but differs from the current study by timeline, area of study and approach to Jewish culture. Hanzl (2012) refers to the Jewish culture as nomadic and to its settlement in town as the mythical shtetl. The current study examines the Jews as urban people (Schlör, 2008). The current study shows that although restricted by

21. Out of 230 prayer houses existed in Łódź between the years 1891-1908 (Walicki, 2000), 48 were operated in the Jewish district.

authorities and religious rules, Jews in Łódź did manage to integrate into the modern industrial town. This is clearly evident in requests for erecting factories in the New Town, the increase in number of Jewish textile workers and erection of tenement buildings in the Jewish district.

These conclusions would not have been deduced without the augmentation of historical, formal and cultural examinations, explaining the cultural and religious life of the Jewish community, as well as the reasons for the erection of Jewish districts, and for their annulment later on. But most important, they shed light on how Jews were seen by the authorities and by non-Jewish town members, and how Łódź was conceived by the Jews themselves. All of these are embodied in maps of Łódź, but also in photographs and other cultural documents which assisted in extracting the Jewish experience in a 19th century Polish industrial town.

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