

MISZELLE

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Digital means for democratic research: Towards a design for mapping a Jewish Europe beyond the Holocaust

European cities are witnessing a proliferation of engagements with Jewish history and the Holocaust. The Shoah Wall of Names in Vienna, installed in 2021,¹ is but one recent addition to the plethora of monuments and heritage institutions that have sprung up in European cities as part of an official statement in the process of becoming European member states,² the booming 'Holocaust tourism',³ or the political conceptualization of a unified and transnational European history.⁴ The Holocaust, as a specific but also limited part of Jewish history, seems to be appropriated for social and political processes that rarely consider Jewish agendas or ethno-religious multiplicity. In light of this, we wonder how Jewish history across all historical eras is positioned in today's European urban spaces beyond institutionalized memorialization and if city dwellers are engaging with it. If they do, how can researchers measure and analyze such spatial engagements with Jewish culture, history and present?

In this article, we will briefly discuss how an in-depth analysis of spatial movements in urban space, performed in relation to Jewish history, can bring complexity to the Holocaust narrative, thus encouraging diversity and inclusivity in European societies. The study is based on the post-modern theory of everyday practices. Theorists have suggested that the 'city' is created from below through people's everyday interactions with urban space. Therefore, to investigate the city, we need to understand people's practices in the public arena.⁵ By looking at spatial engagements with Jewish pasts that are grounded in material realities, we can explore how contemporary narratives relate to historical changes in the urban landscape. To facilitate this, we suggest a combined ethnographic and digital humanities approach. We argue that a deep mapping process and the method of commented walking interviews can provide insight beyond Europe's

¹European Commission Newsroom: Unveiling ceremony of the "Shoah Wall of Names" memorial in Vienna, online: <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/items/726715> [12.11.2021].

²Radonic, Ljiljana: From "Double Genocide" to "the New Jews". Holocaust, Genocide and Mass Violence in Post-Communist Memorial Museums, in: *Journal of Genocide Research* 20 (2018), pp. 510–529; Radonic, Ljiljana: The Europeanization of Memory at the Jasenovac Memorial Museum, in: Ognjenovic, Gorana/Jozelic, Jasna (eds.): *Nationalism and the Politicization of History in the Former Yugoslavia*. Basingstoke 2021, pp. 73–93.

³Reynolds, Daniel P.: *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*. New York 2018; Rütters, Monica: *Juden und Zigeuner im europäischen Geschichtstheater: "Jewish Spaces"/"Gypsy Spaces" – Kazimierz und Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer in der neuen Folklore Europas*. Bielefeld 2012.

⁴Kaiser, Wolfram: *Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and Narratives in the European parliament's House of European History Project*, in: *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55 (2017), pp. 518–534; Mork, Andrea/Christodoulou, Perikles (eds.): *Creating the House of European History*. Luxembourg 2018.

⁵Berman, Marshall: *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. New York 1988; de Certeau, Michel: *Walking in the City*, in: *During*, Simon (ed.): *The Cultural Studies Reader*. London 1993, pp. 126–133; Lefebvre, Henri: *The Production of Space*. Oxford 1991. The limits of their inclusion of ethnic, geographical, and gendered minorities have, of course, already been noted, and in line with this criticism, we endeavor to expand the notion of 'everyday' to all groups of people inhabiting the city. See, for example, Seth, Sanjay: *Modernity without Prometheus. On re-reading Marshall Berman's All that is Solid Melt into Air*, in: *Third World Quarterly* 33 (2012), pp. 1377–1386.

appropriation of the Holocaust. In so doing, we highlight the potential of digital tools in facilitating democratic research that is both socially embedded and holds prospects for social change.

Digital mapping methods for democratic research

Rather than taking locations and geographies as objective entities, critical cartography is a geospatial and digital approach that maps and studies multilayers of meanings attached to a geographical area in order to rethink the power relations portrayed in them.⁶ Deep mapping, sometimes also referred to as thick mapping (or considered as its continuation) in line with the concept of ‘thick description’ in social studies, has emerged in the last decade as one such analytical process.⁷ Both terms, and the similar processes they facilitate, focus on locating and endorsing multiple, subjective meanings of a particular place through time. A researcher working towards a deep (or thick) map is interested in collecting all types of information about a geographical location, creatively and often digitally combining “structures, forms, affects, energies, narratives, connections, memories, imaginaries, mythologies, voices, identities, temporalities, images and textualities”.⁸ This process was initially inspired by William Least Heat-Moon’s book about Chase County in Kansas. By recounting one story after another – be they contemporary, memorial, mythical or historical – he peeled back one layer at a time to reveal the complexity of the place that has been and is Chase County.⁹ Similarly, deep mapping in particular welcomes non-traditional methods and sources in order to reveal and promote marginalized voices.¹⁰ In this way, deep mapping facilitates research that reaches beyond hierarchies of knowledge and promotes a “nuanced, non-reductionist” view of the world.¹¹

Inspired by this approach and its emphasis on bringing stories from below to the forefront, we argue that it is possible to collect, analyze and promote an inclusive Jewish history, both giving voice to people that are not involved in the design and facilitation of today’s memorialization and politicization of the Holocaust, and exploring spatially localized narratives beyond the Holocaust (thus, in the long run, promoting a diverse *and* shared European history). In the pilot study outlined in further detail below, we try out

⁶Pickles, John: *A History of Spaces*. London, New York 2004.

⁷The boundaries between the two approaches of critical cartography often remain vague and ambiguous. In cultural and social sciences, probably not least because of the critical reflection on the theory of thick descriptions, the concept (or rather the term) deep mapping is more widespread. Architecture, for example, on the other hand, more often refers to thick mapping in critical cartography. See, for example: Presner, Todd/Shepard, David/Kawano, Yoh: *Hyper Cities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities*. New Haven 2014.

⁸Roberts, Les: *Spatial Anthropology: Excursions in Liminal Space*. London 2018, p. 51.

⁹Least Heat-Moon, William: *PrairieEarth (a deep map)*. Boston, New York 1999.

¹⁰Cosgrove, Denis: *Mappings*. London 1999; Harmon, Katharine: *The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography*. New York 2009; Pile, Steve/Thrift, Nigel: *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation*. London 1995; Roberts, Les: *Deep Mapping and Spatial Anthropology*, in: *Humanities* 5 (2016), pp. 1–8.

¹¹Harris, Trevor M.: *From PGIS to Participatory Deep Mapping and Spatial Storytelling. An Evolving Trajectory in Community Knowledge Representation in GIS*, in: *The Cartographic Journal* 53 (2016), pp. 318–325, here p. 320; Knowles, Anne Kelly: *Placing History. How Maps, Spatial Data and GIS Are Changing Historical Scholarship*. Redlands 2008; Vaughan, Lauren: *Understanding Through Encountering Place*, in: Kriz, Karel/Cartwright, William/Kinberger, Michaela (eds.): *Understanding Different Geographies. Lecture Notes in Geoinformation and Cartography*. Heidelberg, New York 2013, pp. 41–54.

our research design. It firstly involves commented walking interviews; an ethnographic method that asks participants to share their personal way of navigating the city on a walk, which is conducted together with the researcher.¹² Turning the interviewee into a guide, the method emphasizes the relationship between the individual and the urban setting, and it specifically focuses on capturing the interviewee's sensory and emotional experience through oral dialogue and physical action.¹³ Since "the past is [...] rooted in place", with landscapes serving as "potent triggers for memory",¹⁴ the commented walking interview is a mobile, spatial experience designed to prompt "incidental encounters with the urban place [that] reveal [the participant's] involuntary memory".¹⁵ What is more, commented walking interviews particularly help to reduce power imbalances between researchers and participants and invite multiple ways of sharing knowledge.¹⁶ Secondly, the rich and multifarious data conceived during the commented walking interviews – fieldnotes and recorded conversations that reveal emotional attachments and narratives of the past, geographical locations from the walk itself and photographs taken by the interviewee – are analyzed through the process of deep mapping.

Pilot study: Erasmus+ course at University of Graz

We tested the democratic potential of the deep mapping approach in an Erasmus+ MA course in 2023 on *European Jewish History: How do cities 'think' about and 'act' on their Jewish past?* at the University of Graz together with Garyfyllia Katsavounidou at Aristotle University Thessaloniki. Teachers and students worked as a research team and presented results to and discussed findings with a larger team of researchers in regular exchanges. Students conducted commented walking interviews to explore narratives of Jewish history in the two cities, which were to be visualized in enriched deep maps; digital maps that include the historical and contemporary data collected and portray it in a creative way that reaches beyond a conventional (allegedly objective) map. To map as diverse voices and narratives as possible, we opted for openly usable and thus sustainable digital resources. In contrast to other artistic initiatives on critical cartography,¹⁷ we aimed for a digital product that could map non-digital spheres as well. We thus decided to use Python as the programming landscape and drew on various built-in packages, such as folium (to visualize interactive leaflet maps) and geopandas (to easily add different data layers and connect them to GIS [Geographic Information System] spots and the walking routes taken through the city).¹⁸ For our deep map, we decided to have a historical layer (inclu-

¹²Thibaud, Jean-Paul: La méthode des parcours commentés, in Grosjean, Michèle/Thibaud, Jean-Paul (eds.): *L'escape urbain en méthodes*. Marseille 2001, pp. 79–99.

¹³Popp, Monika: When walking is no longer possible. Investigating crowding and coping practices in urban tourism using commented walks, in: Hall, C. Michael/Ram, Yael/Shoval, Noam (eds.): *The Routledge International Handbook of Walking*. New York 2017, pp. 360–368, here pp. 362–364.

¹⁴Miles, Stephen: Remembrance trails of the Great War on the Western Front: Routes of heritage and memory, in: *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 12 (2017), pp. 441–451, here p. 446.

¹⁵Yücel, Seher Demet Kap/Aksümer, Gizem: Urban morphological change in the case of Selcuk, Turkey: A mixed-methods approach, in: *European Planning Studies* 27 (2019), pp. 126–159, here p. 129.

¹⁶Flick, Uwe: *Qualitative Sozialforschung. Eine Einführung*. Reinbek bei Hamburg 2016, pp. 26–27.

¹⁷Presner et al.: *Hyper Cities*, pp. 72–79.

¹⁸A Geographical Information System (GIS) can store all kinds of different information about a specific area: spots are identified by longitude and latitude; routes are compositions of spots.

ding data from secondary literature), one layer of data connected to memorials, such as *Stolpersteine* and memorial plaques, and other layers that added each respective participant's narrative of the city, expressed through the urban route they chose, the words they found for describing their experience of the city and photographs they took during their walk. This data was linked to geographical locations. Specific spots pointed out by participants, such as synagogues or buildings, or distinct places where they paused, were translated into coordinates with longitude and latitude and stored in the GIS in order to be added to the digital map. Not being limited to specific tasks, Python allowed us to use the diversity of the data collected, as well as adjusting it within the program by putting different facets, such as images, sounds, words and or geographical information, together in an interactive map.

While the design of the course, in alignment with the deep mapping approach, encouraged a flat hierarchy that is rarely found in academic settings, digital tools in general and our chosen software program in particular were equally important for honing democratic research. Digital tools offer a practical dimension: a machine can handle large batches of material and/or data, making the analytical process easier. Obviously, there are countless programming languages and tools, so it is often challenging to decide how to implement a digital project. In choosing Python, we utilized the programming language that has been most widely used since 2021.¹⁹ Python offers specific advantages. It takes only a few steps to set up a layer, making the process of adding and portraying batches of data on personal city navigations straightforward. It is equally simple to display or hide data in the final map. Since the *geopandas* package uses geolocaters, data layers linked to non-standardized narrations of the city can be related to the digital deep map through a single longitude and latitude reference.²⁰ Python is thus distinctly ideal for digital mapping and is easy to navigate for beginners. What is more, as deep mapping encourages us to pursue an open science approach, its implementation with Python is compatible with the European Research Council's 'FAIR principles'.²¹ The conception, the metadata and protocols can be made accessible, allowing a broad public to interact with and reuse the material as soon as it is published. By doing so, we embrace the democratic aim of deep mapping in making research open-ended in terms of both source material and public engagement.²²

¹⁹Tiobe: Tiobe index for July 2023, online: The Tiobe Index is the commonly referenced indicator for the popularity of a programming language. <https://www.tiobe.com/tiobe-index/> [17.07.2023].

²⁰For all non-standardized layers, that is: for data conceived during the commented walking interviews, we based the longitude and latitude information on the urban location which prompted the basic idea of the layer (for instance, a personal drawing of the street).

²¹According to the European Research Commission 'Fair Principles' research data should be "findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable". The open source network GIT allows for a long-term availability. See European Research Council: Data Management fair principles for open research, online: https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/docs/h2020-funding-guide/cross-cutting-issues/open-access-data-management/data-management_en.htm [06.07.2023].

²²Harris, Trevor M.: Deep Geography – Deep Mapping: Spatial Storytelling and a Sense of Place, in: Bodenhamer, David J./Corrigan, John/Harris, Trevor M. (eds.): Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives. Bloomington 2015, pp. 28–53.

Democratic results from digital mapping

We have demonstrated how the deep mapping approach inspired us to design a pilot study that put democracy first on as many levels as possible, including the internal research structure, research methods and output. As we have shown, the digital element proved particularly important in facilitating both an easy navigation of diverse data and open-ended, publicly available research. But what about the results? What did the commented walking interviews, analyzed through the digital deep mapping, reveal about urban engagement with Jewish pasts?

First of all, in analyzing how the interviewees navigated their interpretations of Jewish history and culture in the city, few narratives of Jewish histories beyond Holocaust-related commemoration were discovered; at the same time, the results from both cities pointed to the large void caused by the Holocaust. In trying to locate Jewish places in Graz and Thessaloniki, some locations chosen by interviewees were related to historical communities and their activities. These locations are not used for Jewish purposes today and seldom offer visible markers of their Jewish heritage. At the same time, the other type of location chosen by interviewees were Holocaust memorials. These two categories of Jewish places invited the student interviewer and interviewee to reflect on the Jewish individuals, and their hypothetical futures in the city, who disappeared. In concrete terms, we learned from our deep maps that interviewees and interviewees experienced this void *together* as they navigated and traced Jewish history. At the end of the course, the students specifically reflected on the affective experience the commented walking interviews facilitated in relation to Jewish absence. In other words, by mixing methods from ethnography and digital humanities we grasped, beyond the mere movement of people across the urban landscape, individuals' existential implications of living, encountering and co-producing space.²³ This way, the city *becomes* a palimpsest of relational spaces as our research takes place,²⁴ producing, in an activist sense, more complex readings of the prominent Holocaust narrative. By co-producing these alternative narratives with both students and participants, our study might even change their perception of the Jewish past and present in their city.

The encouragement of spatial co-production is vital for achieving a result with democratic dimensions. Demographic reports from 2020 reveal the steady decline of Europe's Jewish population,²⁵ accompanied by an increase of antisemitic agitation and acts. Educational centers that focus on Jewish culture and history are becoming less and less popular, prompting questions about the future role of Jewish studies.²⁶ In this social setting, Holocaust heritage sites have emerged as a virtual and imaginary space for non-Jews to encounter a small, curated parcel of Jewish history.²⁷ In contrast, as interviewees

²³Tuan, Yi-Fu: *Space and Place. The Perspective of Experience*. Minnesota 1977.

²⁴In understanding spaces as relational products, we consider them to be given meaning through people's interactions with them. In turn, human beings *become* in spaces. See Löw, Martina: *Raumsoziologie*. Frankfurt 2015.

²⁵DellaPergola, Sergio/Staetsky, Daniel L.: *Jews in Europe at the turn of the Millennium. Population Trends and Estimates*. London 2020.

²⁶Pinto, Diana: *Jewish spaces in a topsy turvy Europe*. University of Gothenburg [05.05.2022].

²⁷Gruber, Ruth Ellen: *Beyond Virtually Jewish. New authenticities and real imaginary spaces in Europe*, in: *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 99 (2009), pp. 487–504. The conceptualization of 'goy-normativity' emphasizes that non-Jews frame present-day Jewish spaces as well as narratives about Jewish pasts, see Coffey, Judith/Laumann, Vivien: *Gojnormativität. Warum wir anders über Antisemitismus sprechen müssen*. Berlin 2021.

and interviewees walked through their cities, our study prompted them to approach the void caused by the Holocaust, contemplate the loss of Jewish culture and engage with the everyday difficulties faced by today's European Jewry. The research design thus expands Jewish history beyond the Holocaust and showcases the potential of Jewish studies in fostering acceptance for diversity in a practical way.

Relatedly, students in the Erasmus+ course were struck by the void they experienced with their interviewees, which prompted them to address larger issues; namely, (the limits of) localizability, visualization and spatiality. For example, some interviewees had previously visited an exhibition or knew about Jewish history from other experiences and were then surprised to find no visible traces of a once rich and diverse Jewish life. Is it possible to adequately map and measure such readings of the city? Through the digital facilitation of deep maps, we learned that in comparing different spatial layers we can analyze the (non-)role material spaces play in shaping city dwellers' perceptions of Jewish history, which opens up questions about the prominence of Holocaust memorials. Through digital mapping tools, we can also learn about multilayers of meanings attached to a geographical area by reading personal navigations and experiences of the composition of the urban fabric as it unfolds in the deep map. This way, we can find narratives that bring nuance to established narratives. A particular advantage emerges through this bottom-up, digital approach: we can research the presence and shape of Jewish pasts in European cities in order to analyze and promote the existence of a shared, inclusive European narrative.

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