

Due to the war in Ukraine, our teacher training seminar for Ukrainian teachers had to be held online this year. The consortium partners are closely watching the situation and are deeply concerned about the safety of the teachers there. Before the start of the seminar, we asked all the participants not to neglect safety warnings and follow all safety measures.

Despite the appalling situation in the country and the fact that the seminar was held during the summer break in Ukraine, more than eighty teachers joined us for a six-hour teacher training seminar “Teaching Jewish Heritage – Using Jewish Cemeteries in Class” on August 3rd and 4th 2022. The seminar language was Ukrainian which enabled us to engage more educators. The program was developed to ensure that the participants receive both theoretical knowledge about the Jewish life and Jewish heritage in Ukraine and get the chance to use the acquired knowledge in practice, working on ideas of how they could use Jewish cemeteries in a classroom.

We invited Dr. Marta Havryshko, director of Babyn Yar Interdisciplinary Studies Institute, to present on Jewish life and heritage in Ukraine on the first day. Dr. Havryshko held a comprehensive lecture on origins of Jewish life in Ukraine, the history and evolution of Jewish-Ukrainian relations. Following the lecture, Dr. Vladyslava Moskalets from the Ukrainian Catholic University narrowed down the topic and showed her presentation “Jewish Cemetery as a Mirror of the Town”. Dr. Moskalets talked about the history of Jewish gravestone symbols, about the signs and attributes of a Jewish cemetery.

The second day was about practice, Dr. Kateryna Malakhova from ESJF led a workshop on epitaph and Jewish headstone symbols. She did not only talk about the Jewish symbols on the cemeteries, but also explained how to read the symbols and epitaph. Participants practiced reading the epitaphs themselves. After that, knowing much more about the Jewish history on Ukrainian territories, learning how to find and distinguish a Jewish cemetery, what one could learn reading the epitaphs, we could talk on how to use all that knowledge in classroom. Two Centropa teachers shared their excellent projects about the Jewish cemeteries in Ukraine and thoroughly led the participants through all the steps of their projects: from determining goals to dissemination of the finished project. They shared their experience on how to interest and motivate students, how to find a connection between Jewish and Ukrainian heritage and history, and how to enlist the support of a local government. At the end participants worked in groups to brainstorm on future project ideas. Finally, educators presented topics and goals of the potential projects. All the participants were active and eager to share their experience and ideas.

We hope that participants enjoyed the seminar, found it useful and that we managed to “build a bridge” between theory and practice, showing how to use Jewish cemeteries in class. We are looking forward to further cooperate with our teachers and would be glad to hear about their projects.