

KLAIPĖDA JEWISH COMMUNITY: SURVIVAL, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Sada Petružienė

ABSTRACT

The attitude of Klaipėda Jewish community towards survival, alternation and continuity of community is being analyzed in the present article. Klaipėda Jewish community is regenerated in independent Lithuania, and it unifies few members. As a rule, they are Russian speaking elderly people, having little knowledge in its nation history and customs. It was expected, that Klaipėda Jewish community will naturally vanish, and young people will emigrate. In a fact we see at present, that this community is still lively, active and integrated one. A short excursion to the history of Klaipėda Jewish community, regarding the issues of its survival, alternation and continuity is presented hereby, and attention towards Klaipėda, as cross-border region, is pointed out.

KEY WORDS: Jewish community, survival, changes, continuity, Klaipėda.

ANOTACIJA

Straipsnyje analizuojamas Klaipėdos žydų bendruomenės narių požiūris į bendruomenės išlikimą, kaitą ir tęstinumą. Klaipėdos žydų bendruomenė, atsikūrusi nepriklausomoje Lietuvoje, vienijo nedaug narių, kurių didžioji dalis – rusakalbiai, pagyvenę, mažai žinantys savo tautos istoriją ir papročius žmonės. Buvo manoma, kad Klaipėdos žydų bendruomenė natūraliai išnyks, o jaunimas emigruos. Šiuo metu ši bendruomenė yra gyvybinga, veikli ir integruota. Pateikiamas trumpas ekskursas į Klaipėdos žydų bendruomenės raidos istoriją, kuri sietina su straipsnyje aptariama jų išlikimo, kaitos ir tęstinumo problematika. Šiuo atveju atkreipiamas dėmesys ir į Klaipėdos, kaip paribio zonos, specifiką.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: žydų bendruomenė, išlikimas, kaita, tęstinumas, Klaipėda.

Dr. Sada Petružienė

Centre of Educational Innovations, Faculty of Pedagogy, Klaipėda University

S. Neries 5, LT-92227 Klaipėda, Lithuania

E-mail: pk.pf@ku.lt

Introduction

Klaipėda city and its surroundings always have been multi-cultural area because of its unique historical development. According to J. Rosin, the Klaipėda's Jewish community has its own history, which is known from the 15th – the 16th centuries¹, and unique status, comparing to the other Jewish Diaspora communities in Lithuania or in other countries.

Historiography. The first and one of the most outstanding sources about Klaipėda Jewish community is published by J. Rulf (1900). Another very valuable historical source of Klaipėda city, where rather thorough description of Jewish community's life is found, is a book by J. Zembrickis, called "Klaipėda in the 19th Century" („Klaipėda XIX amžiuje“) translated from the 1st edition in German language (Klaipėda, 1904) and published in Lithuanian language in 2004. Referring to the different historical materials, mentioned above J. Rosin introduced an exhaustive developmental history of the Klaipėda's Jewish community². The questions of Jewish life were thor-

¹ See: ROSIN, J. Klaipėda (Memel). <<http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/memel/memel2.html>> [last visit: March 14, 2008]. An author makes an assumption, that Jews location in Klaipėda since the 15th century is probable, despite there are no real proofs to be remained. The Jews were mentioned in the written sources from April 20, 1567 in the Ordinance, signed by Albrecht, Duke of Prussia, who ordered to banish them from the city.

² ROSIN, J. Klaipėda (Memel). <<http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/memel/memel2.html>> [last visit: March 14, 2008].

oroughly revised in V. Vareikis works (1993); valuable historical researches were accomplished by R. Kibelka-Leiserowitz (2001, 2002). Plenty of valuable materials are presented in a book by J. Tatoris (1994) “The Old Klaipėda. Urbanistic Development and Architecture until 1939” („*Senoji Klaipėda. Urbanistinė raida ir architektūra iki 1939 metų*“). Valuable research works, regarding the questions of Jewish self-awareness and identity, were disclosed in the publications by C. Lemee (2003, 2009). S. Atamukas (2001) study “Lithuanian Jews’ Road” („*Lietuvos žydų kelias*“), regarding the questions of Lithuanian Jews’ history, was declared as significant. A monograph by A. Pažeraitė, regarding questions of *Litvak*’s Judaism, was published in 2005. The strategy and tactics of the accomplished empirical research were chosen referring to “The Methodology of Qualitative Researches” („*Kokybinių tyrimų metodologija*“) by B. Bitinas, L. Rupšienė and V. Žydžiūnaitė (2008) and “The Methodology of Data Selection for Qualitative Research” („*Kokybinio tyrimo duomenų rinkimo metodologija*“) by L. Rupšienė (2007).

Issues. There are not enough studies, regarding historical development of Klaipėda Jewish community. Nevertheless, the present situation, problems of community’s survival, alternation and self-consciousness are absolutely unexplored. There is no answer to problematic issue – what influences survival, alternation and continuity of Jewish national communities and how this is associated with regional particularity. In this respect the problem, being analyzed is unique and not investigated. However, relevance of a problem of Klaipėda Jewish community’s alternation and integration is obvious both historically and anthropologically. The purpose of article – to analyze survival, alternation and continuity of Klaipėda Jewish community, by determining specific parallels of regional historical development, and to reveal conception of community’s members Jewish self-consciousness.

The research is burden by political aspects regarding genocide during the Second World War, differences in outlook and world-view, ethnicity and religion issues and cultural mythology regarding Jewish people.

Research Methodology and Technique. While accomplishing empirical research, a strategy of ethnographic recognition was used. This strategy, used for social researches, is based on informants’ stories about past activities, accumulative experience and empathies, regarding other individuals and social institutions. The strategy is supported by the analysis of written and oral texts. The applied strategy of narration is based on an assumption, that people describe social reality in the form of narration of events to be experienced. Although this strategy is criticized for the excessively emphasized analysis of person’s empathies and his behaviour in a concrete situation, personal experience is an inevitable part of social phenomena³. The events of historical significance, situations of un-remote past, experienced by a narrator; narrations, describing present situation, have been emphasized, for which qualitative content analysis method was used. For the accumulation of qualitative data, an interview method was used. Methodical peculiarity of the present research is a necessity to recognize cultural context and to be able to adjust in the social, historical and religious environment of Klaipėda’s Jewish community by both formulating and not formulating interview content. The processes of community’s development take place in groups of people, which in one or another way influence behaviour of individuals. That means that the chosen ethnographic attitude is productive. While applying it, an assumption, that the reality of community’s development can be perceived only by analyzing historical context that influences relations of community members, was followed.

³ BITINAS B., RUPŠIENĖ L., ŽYDŽIŪNAITĖ V. *Kokybinių tyrimų metodologija*, 2008, p. 143.

My interest to study the history of Klaipėda's Jewish community, its cultural, material and immaterial heritage since its re-establishment is known since 1989. The first stage of my empirical research works was accomplished in 2007. The research was continued in 2008, 2009 and 2010. The empirical part of longitudinal research, being accomplished in 2009 and 2010, is presented in the present article. The individual interview guide and partly structuralized approach of interview were used. The data was accumulated, analyzed and summarized regarding the following themes: the survival issues of Klaipėda's Jewish community; alternation, demographic rates and social activities of community; continuity/insights of future (perspectives); the conception of definition of self-awareness.

Before fixating an interview by video and sound recording, an agreement from informant has been received. This resulted in the inner credibility of research. The research sample was chosen using the objective method. The leaders and individuals from the Klaipėda's Jewish community, actively taking part in organizing social, cultural and religious events for town's people; also those, who took part in re-establishing and shaping community as a legal unit, were chosen as informants. The research sample is composed of 10 individuals, 3 of whom are community members, who initiated re-establishment of the community *de facto* and *de jure*; 3 – individuals that are or were the presidents of the community; 4 – participants, organizing educational-training activity for community members; 3 – organizing activities of social help; 2 – initiating religious/ritual events. The research involves deductive aspect, grounded on historical knowledge of community's formation and re-establishment periods and essential present moments. A short review regarding the development of Klaipėda's Jewish community will be presented.

Short Review of Historical Development of Jewish Community's Formation and Re-establishment in Klaipėda

Using the term *Jewish community*, it is important to specify that according to the Jewish religious tradition a community can be composed of thus many Jewish families, that they could form *minjan*, i.e. ten men older than 13 years old (when reaching this age each boy attends the *bar mitzvah* ritual and is consecrated into the adult), that gather together for the common prayer. In the recent theological dictionary it is written that voluntary-private nature community forms of Jewish Diasporas communities are the closest for the present community's conception⁴. A. Pažeraitė, quoting J. Verbickienė, states that the Jewish community in Grand Principality of Lithuania, refers to a local Jews' group, which consisted of not less than ten grown-up men – house owners, that could form *minjan* and keep the synagogue and the cemetery as the community's property. Referring to the conception of the definition, the establishment period of Jewish community is not the period of the 15th – the 16th centuries, but the second half of the 17th century – when the first house of prayer for the Jewish community was set out and the rituals of Jewish life were performed⁵. The numerous Jewish community was established only in the 19th century, after the Edict of Emancipation had been announced, that granted Jews the full citizenship rights. However, the town council rarely satisfied Jews' requests to grant them the citizenship rights. Regarding Klaipėda region, Jews mostly

⁴ VORGRIMLER, H. *Naujasis teologijos žodynas*. Kaunas: Katalikų interneto tarnyba, 2003, p. 92.

⁵ ROSIN J. (Klaipėda (Memel). [viewed 2008-03-14] Approach through the Internet: According to (<<http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/memel/memel2.html>>), Moshe Jacobsohn de Jonge (Junior), while coming to Klaipėda, brought a teacher to his children, with the aim to perform religious Jewish life rituals, and in 1674 he established the first house of prayer for the Jewish community. It can be stated that by the courtesy of Moshe Jacobsohn de Jonge (Junior) the Jewish community in Klaipėda became the important center of Jewish economic, religious and cultural life.

lived in the borderline, along the national boundary of Prussia and Russia, also gathered around Klaipėda and an important road Klaipėda – Kretinga⁶.

With community increase, the number of Jews was also growing. It is evidenced by Dr. J. Rūlf's sketchbook⁷, where it is mentioned, that in the year 1855 289 Jews lived in Klaipėda, and in the year 1867 their population even reached 887. Referring to the number of indicated years it can be stated that Jews population in Klaipėda was growing steadily and rapidly.

The German Empire, formed in 1871, started to regulate the immigration of Jews. According to the state enactment, published in Berlin, the Klaipėda's Jews were required either to accept the citizenship of Germany or to leave the region. Then Klaipėda became an intermediary centre of emigration to USA, Palestine and elsewhere. Even the repeatedly held negotiation with contemporary chancellor of Empire O. Bismarck was vague and 700 Jews were forced to leave the town.

After the 1871 year demographic decrease the quantity of Jews increased steadily, but the ethnic constitution of the community has changed. This was influenced by the number of incoming Jews from the East, particularly after the pogroms of Jews had spread in Tsarist Russia. The Lithuanian Jews had never experienced the horror of pogroms. In 1881–1882, the tide of pogroms in the South of Russia spread after the homicide of Tsar Alexander the 2nd, and later in the years 1891–1892 the expulsion of Jews from Moscow and neighbouring guberniyas forced Jews to emigrate from the East⁸.

On the December the 1st, 1905, during the population census in Klaipėda city, 858 Jews by religion status were registered. In the year 1910 there were 851 Jews in Klaipėda, 358 of whom were Russians by origin, and they haven't got the citizenship rights; however, they lived with "stay" certificate in the town. Then, the majority of Klaipėda's Jews consisted of Russian and Polish Jews⁹.

After the World War II the Klaipėda's Jewish community almost did not exist, however the Jews, who had experienced the nightmare of war and genocide, gradually gathered together in Klaipėda. V. Vareikis mentions in his work "Klaipėda in the 20th Century", that in 1950'ies, after establishing schools in Klaipėda city, Russian schools were attended by Jewish, Ukrainian, Belarusian schoolchildren and children of other nationalities¹⁰. That is the first knowledge about the life of Jews, revived in Klaipėda. About the year 1947 the number of Jews, migrated from the depth of Soviet Union, increased. They immediately coalesced with Soviet party and economic nomenclature. Such Jews soon forgot their major traditions, religion and language, and they were not interested into their national culture heritage. The majority of them even did not consider themselves as Jews, except the actual record in the passport.

Referring to the inventory data, accomplished in 1955, 56% Lithuanians, 35% Russians, 3% Belarusians, 1% Jews and 5% inhabitants of other nationalities lived in Klaipėda¹¹.

As a result of immigration to Israel, the number of Jews in Klaipėda town decreased¹² (in 1959 – 0,9 %, in 1970 – 0,6%, 1979 – 0,4% Jews lived in the city).

⁶ KIBELKA, R. Klaipėdos ir Šilutės žydai XIX amžiuje. In: *Baltija 2001. Klaipėda*: Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla, 2001, p. 192.

⁷ RULF, J. *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Memel*. Bonn, 1900.

⁸ ATAMUKAS, S. *Lietuvos žydų kelias. Nuo XIV amžiaus iki XX a. pabaigos*. Vilnius: Alma littera, 2001, p. 54.

⁹ VILEIŠIS, V. *Tautiniai santykiai Mažojoje Lietuvoje ligi Didžiojo karo istorijos ir statistikos šviesoje*. Politinių ir socialinių mokslų instituto leidinys Nr. 3. Kaunas, 1935, p. 212–213.

¹⁰ VAREIKIS, V. *Klaipėda XX amžiuje*. Klaipėda: Menininkų namai, 1993, p. 65.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 69.

¹² Ibid, p. 74.

After the Jewish cultural association had been established in Lithuania in 1988, its Klaipėda department started his own activities. It has happened after the community received the territory of cemetery, which earlier belonged to the Jews. So, the Klaipėda's Jewish community was founded in 1989 and it started its activity in the building, allowed to be used by Klaipėda town municipality (*Žiedų* alley 3). At this time 710 Jews¹³ were registered in Klaipėda, however, the re-established community have had about 200 active members. In January 1990 681 Jews lived in Klaipėda¹⁴, and about 100 – 150 of them participated in the activities of Jewish cultural association. Namely those people had the greatest influence while strengthening the newly established Jewish community in Klaipėda.

The Jewish religious community was officially registered in 1997. The rise of Klaipėda's Jewish religious community was influenced by the laws of Republic of Lithuania, which allowed only the religious communities to claim for the reversionary property¹⁵.

Regarding historical parallels the above mentioned facts witness, that division into communities was typical to the Jews of Klaipėda historically.

In the year 1858 the government of Prussia strictly required the consolidation of German and Russian Jewish communities. All the Jews had to belong to the one community and to pay taxes that comprised the fixed percent. The communities were officially consolidated on the 9th of May, 1862, and comprised *Chevrah Kadishah*. Despite they officially comprised one community, German and Russian Jews were not solid.

In 1886 a synagogue near the *Grižgatvio* Street was established and it belonged to the German Jews in Memel (Klaipėda city name from German times). It was open since the end of the 19th century up to the beginning of the 20th century. After the World War I the place of the above mentioned synagogue in the city maps was empty: possibly it has been demolished¹⁶.

In the crossroad of *Užpakalinio (Galinio) Pylimo* and *Sinagogų* streets there was a synagogue of Polish Jews in Memel. The latter synagogue was mentioned in the city map from the year 1840. On the crossroad of triangular site there was a note „*Die Synagoge*“ (The Synagogue). At the end of the 19th century this synagogue was probably also demolished, because it was not found in the city maps of the early 20th century.

During the interwar period (1918 – 1940), in the Newtown (the former *Liepojos* street; at present *Herkaus Manto* street) “Synagogue of Intelligent” was opened. However, its real place is not completely known. It is possible that it provided its activities in the private house.

So, there are four synagogues known in Klaipėda (Memel), which were built and existed here in different periods. At present times the Klaipėda's Jewish community hasn't got a building for synagogue, so prayers and forms of worship use to take place in the community house in *Žiedų* alley¹⁷.

The appearance of separate Jewish communities in the Klaipėda city has to be understood firstly as the result of the differences in their cultural, language-speaking, value-system and traditional way of living, and just secondly (and much less) as the differences in the “Jewish” identity understanding. As a result, the problems of Jewish people integration into a real cultural environ-

¹³ EIDINTAS, A. *Lietuvos žydų žudynių byla: dokumentų ir straipsnių rinkinys*. Vilnius: Vaga, 2001, p. 189.

¹⁴ VISOCKYTĖ R. Išsigelbėjimo šiaudas – Izraelis. *Vakarų ekspresas*, 1991 02 19.

¹⁵ LUKOŠIŪTĖ S. Žydų bendruomenėje daugiau advokatų nei menininkų. *Vakarų ekspresas*, 2006 11 24.

¹⁶ LEISEROWITZ, R. *Die Illusion der transmigratorischen Existenz. Juden im Memel des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Neue Folge Band X / 2001. Nordost – Institut Lüneburg, 2002, S. 311.

¹⁷ TATORIS, J. *Senoji Klaipėda. Urbanistinė raida ir architektūra iki 1939 metų*. Vilnius: Mokslas, 1994, p. 201.

ment appeared. It was complicated by the peculiarities of city development, and whole political, economic and social situation in Klaipėda.

Survival Issues of Klaipėda Jewish Community

By newly establishing a Jewish community in the 1990-ies, the majority of its active members expressed their opinions that they did not believe in the vividness of the latter community. After the borders had been opened a number of youth, young families and middle-aged people hurried to migrate to Israel, USA, Australia, etc. It seemed to be, that a small, mainly Russian-spoken, older people unifying Klaipėda's Jewish community would naturally vanish. Today, after two decades have passed, we can state that the Klaipėda's Jewish community still exists, and it is assuming more vivid national and religious traits.

The community members, being questioned, commented about the survival of community in the latter 20 years:

We exist by a miracle and miracles always take place. Fundamentally, tendencies are the same as they were. There is no youth. Community is extremely old. And I see no perspectives that one day it will recover from inner resources. [Informant No. 1., being participated in establishment of Klaipėda Jewish community and Klaipėda Jewish religious community, organizing religious events and educational activities]

[...] Situation in the community is really sad. When we gather for a pray, it is essential that 10 Jewish men would take part there. Community has about 150 Jews, but even on Saturday the necessary number does not assemble. [Informant No. 6., taking part in organization of religious events]

Almost all respondents use to find as the main problem in the perspectives of Jewish community that its members are senior or elderly people only, and young people do not join the community:

Young people need nothing. When a person becomes a bit older, he starts to be interested and comes there. Maybe he finds time, I do not know, but person matures and comes. Something will be in future, I do not think that it will vanish, but it will further flounder. [...]. The biggest problem – mixed marriages. Mixed marriages are a suicide. It seems that nothing happened. There is no wide choice. [...]. But when young man knows, that he seeks for Jewish wife only, he will search for her everywhere. He is not supposed to search for her only in Klaipėda as an important provision. [...]. Mixed marriages destroy everything. [Informant No.1.]

Why does the community still exist? Respondents indicate that it's a God's will. Informants clearly express their concern with the demographic community's situation and point out that a problem of community's survival exists.

While asked about the origin of community members, informants use to indicate that the majority of Klaipėda's Jewish community members came here during the Soviet Period from various former allied republics: Ukraine, Belarus, Russia (and they are Russian-speaking people).

There are only few Lithuanian Jews, that's all. From Lithuania-Major. There are no Lithuanian Jews. I know one family, but it departs. [Informant No. 8., organizing activities of social support and educational activities]

[...] Before the war times Klaipėda have had a huge number of Jews, and everything was easy and clear. After Holocaust they nearly vanished. When Soviets came, the spiritual Jews left, because holding of an old Lithuanian passport enabled them to do so. Those, who remained, forgot our old traditions, their children attended Soviet schools. My parents tried to maintain traditions, as father's grandfather was Rabbi. People neglected traditions noticeably. [Informant No. 7, organizing educational training activities of community members]

The demographic situation of community members in the recent 20 years is defined the following way:

Those numbers that were in 90-ies... People, more than were registered, departed from Klaipėda to Israel, but community only increased. [Informant No. 4., taken part in establishment of Klaipėda Jewish community]

[...] A number of people, who join community and pay taxes, remain the same ones. [...]. It should decrease, but they still are the same. It should decrease, as many left, emigrated from Lithuania. Assimilation is taking place, children wed with Lithuanians, Russians and others. However, the stable number remains. Somebody comes back, arrives. Actually, this is a miracle! [Informant No. 2., one of community leaders]

[...] If referring to the Law of Israel, and count when at least one of grandparents is a Jew, then would be about 300 Jews. [Informant No. 9., one of community leaders, organizing social support activities]

Regarding the question of community's development and continuity, the attitude of informants was rather unanimous:

My vision for today: for several years I had expected that younger people would join us. There are some of them, but even those exceptions did not come and my hope is lost now. What can I do? [...]. The Jews are still wandering around the world and are arriving everywhere: in order to come somewhere, to eat something, to pray. There are quite a few communities, existing in this way. They are more numerous in such Asian countries, which have no locals. So, they become locals there in about 20 years in time. And locals ... [...] natural extinction ... [...]. If regarding all this more objectively, the perspectives are sad, but we exist somehow. It is a miracle. I think that this will continue further. There will be no blossom. But something step by step will continue ... [Informant No. 1.]

[...] Regarding continuity, certainly, it is problematic, because culture and heritage are transferred from generation to generation. There is already no such a continuity regarding religious customs. [...]. We survived the Soviet Period extremely severely, when our customs had to be hidden. [Informant No. 2.]

It can be stated that the problem of survival is relevant to the Klaipėda's Jewish community. In informants' utterances, the concern about demographic situation, continuity and future perspective

of the community is expressed. However, it is also indicated that the number of community members has been stable for already two decades.

Community's Development and Social Activities

Today Klaipėda Jewish community is composed of two communities (i.e. *Jewish community* and *Religious Jewish community*); each of it has its president, however, the core is basically composed of community members.

As it was mentioned, Klaipėda Religious Jewish community was established after a regulation has been passed, which determined that only religious communities are able to claim for the properties, being received back.

The leaders of the community provided with the information about the present situation, existing relations and community's functions.

Two communities were established only for Lithuanian state. [...]. I'd like to believe that we will succeed in retaining undivided community in Klaipėda. [Informant No. 2.]

[...] The relations are peaceful, thanks to the God. There are some things in common, others – different. For example, the seniors are the matter of word community. The feasts – common matter. [...]. The canteen is also a common thing. Some conflicts arise, but it still is open. [...] The basic and only function of the religious community is the preservation and continuity of religious faith. [Informant No. 1.]

The respondents, being questioned, indicate that formally two communities exist; however, when answering to the questions, they usually use a general pronoun of *the Jewish community*. It can be stated that both communities are perceived as parts of one community that are responsible for particular activities.

The aims and functions of the community changes referring to the community's attitudes and abilities:

The functions of community have changed. At first, it was important to let the Jews feel that they are Jews. Once, there was learning of languages, theatre [...]. Many people left. And the community accomplished a certain work, by pursuing to help people to leave and decide where to go, as migration existed and a numerous part left to Israel. The major reason – economical, but another reason also contributed. And that is OK. Today, there is no one to leave. Those, who wanted, have already done this. There is no such a function anymore. The period of *Alija* has finished. Those people, who are there, are not ready to leave. Somebody leaves sometimes, but the others stay here. [Informant No.1.]

The Klaipėda's Jewish community perform an intensive social, cultural, educative and charitable activities and it keeps in touch with the all Lithuanian Jewish communities. The general seminars, youth and students' summer or winter camps, religious actions for children and adults; also the religious feasts are celebrated. Numerous educational activities take place in the Klaipėda's Jewish community. Sunday school for children and youth, lectures for adults, studies of Torah *Kolel* and club for seniors' *Chesed* are provided in the community.

The Sunday school was established in 1994. At present, 10 children in age from 3 to 12 years attend it. It is a religious school, open each Sunday for some hours. The aim of the school is to acquaint children and youth with Jewish culture and art better, and also to popularize Jewish traditions.

The activities of Sunday school are valued. The informants support them:

[...] A Sunday school is an important part of the community's life. [...]. It was a period when Jewish schoolchildren had almost disappeared. But now it is a real Jewish school. It provides children with general perception of traditions. [Informant No. 1]

[...] The school has been open for many years. We are seeking that it would be a real Jewish school. [Informant No. 3., organizing training/educational activities]

Sunday school provides various activities. Its main goal is to help for young people fully express their intellectual and creative capabilities. The great attention is given for the interest for Jewish nation history and culture stimulation. The basic aim of school's activities is the encouragement of children's spirituality, by invoking inter-human and national values. Classes are based on traditions, and the feasts help children to develop Jewish consciousness. The school offers a wide range of various programs: the *ivrit* language courses are provided, and the Jewish national songs, dances and history are learnt. Various lessons of needlework, where children are encouraged to make various feasts related attributes, take place, as well as other handicrafts. Children are allowed to bring their works home, and it will remind them the Saints of each feast, and where they are used. Seminars on various themes, discussions, meetings with famous people also take place in the Jewish Sunday school. Children are able to join the summer and winter camps. The school also use to keep in touch with Lithuanian origin children, youth and students' organizations.

The so called *yeshiva* actions have been taking place for a long time once a week, on Mondays. *Yeshiva*, in its traditional conception, is a school for adults, constantly providing traditional religious practices and lessons. They take place for several hours and are designed for people of different age. However, the members of the Klaipėda's Jewish community also name their religious practices, possible to be provided this way:

[...] Each Monday we have special activities for elderly people. They are acquainted with history and traditions. [Informant No. 7.]

The lectures are cognitive and even philosophical in *yeshiva*. The main aim here is to constantly deepen and perceive the process of Jewish national development. Those practices for adults are organized and held by *rebe* (so called *rabbis*, in the Chasidism's religious trend) from Vilnius.

One more particular and exceptional phenomenon in the life of Klaipėda's Jewish community – origin of *Kolel*, since 2008:

We have done *Kolel*. It is really a unique thing. I think that it imparts liveliness to community, a real liveliness. [Informant No. 1.]

Kolel, as also educational institution appeared by the initiative and efforts of the leader of Klaipėda's Religion Jewish community. The Torah studies, taking place every day and lasting all

the workday, are constantly held here. The grown-up and married men use to gather together in *Kolel*. The main and only activities here are the studies of Torah. Those Jewish men use to go to such long lasting practices, as to their main job. There are not many such students, at present – 5 persons. The *Kolel* studies for them are financed from various funds. According to the *Law*, each Jew has to study Torah, and in case he is not able to spare his time for those studies, he must support people who do this. This way the above mentioned funds are created and Torah experts are supported. Those studies in the Klaipėda's community are guided by *Dajan* (so called *rabbis*, who have achieved a particular, widely accepted level). Every day for some hours he communicates with the Torah studying people with the help of informational technologies by remote means. All the other time such studies use to take place individually, in pairs, or in small groups, working in the usual, traditional methods.

A club of Jewish seniors *Chesed* started its activities in 1994 in Klaipėda. This club attend about 50 people at present, and 20 of them are regular attendants. The members of the club use to come together each Monday. They are elderly people, willing to socialize:

Old Jewish codgers, so called seniors, use to spend the end of their life together with their community. They like to come here simply to communicate to each other. There are also Russian-speaking people in the community [...]. They have their communication group, just in Russian language. [...] I can not state that their communication is specifically Jewish. [Informant No. 4.]

The members of *Chesed* are usually lonely, diseased and poor people that need both material and spiritual support. The aims of the club are the venerable-aged people meetings, Jewish feasts, celebrated collectively, and preservation this way of Jewish national traditions, transfer and acceptance of their cultural heritage.

The seniors use to read literature, get acquainted with the extracts from Torah. A choir was also gathered in *Chesed*, and it took part at many performances in various communities' events. A library with actual Jewish-topic books, newspapers and other publications in Russian, Lithuanian, Hebrew and Yiddish languages is collected here as well.

All the seniors receive actual help, regarding their needs and necessity for social support. The major aim of those programs – to improve the social conditions of lonely and diseased venerable age people. This is implemented by the following means: cost-free dinner in the canteen, the project of which is supported by worldwide organization “Joint”; with the efforts of the president of Klaipėda's Jewish community a *kosher* cuisine in summer of 2006 was established. Until now this kitchen is constantly operating and the community members regard it with pride:

We have kosher kitchen. One from two in whole Lithuania. [Informant No. 1.]
[...] We have kosher kitchen. It is meaty. [Informant No. 6.]

Religious rituals and traditional feasts are inseparable part of community's everyday life. Earlier community did not have a special place for prayers, as there was no Saint Torah and special equipment. With combined efforts of an experienced elder of the community (at present he has gone to live in Germany) and other community members, a lodgement for the prayers and learning was equipped. In 1997 a volume of Torah was brought from Vilnius *Martynas Mažvydas* National Library and it was delivered to the Klaipėda's Jewish community.

In 2009 the community purchased its own Torah. A feast in order to signify this occasion was arranged. One of the community leaders, while asked, why it was necessary to buy this book, in case the community already has Torah from National Library, explained this decision the following way:

Torah, received from the Library is an old one. For our uses we need a newer one. [...]. We want to have our Torah, because as it was freely received, it can be taken back anytime, as it is not our property. Now we have our own Torah. [Informant No. 10., organizing religious ritual events and taking part in educational activity]

The activeness of Klaipėda's Jewish community is felt not only inside it, but also in all social life of the whole Klaipėda city. It is important to admit, that each year, in the beginning of *Hanukkah* feast, *Menorah* (*Hanukkah*) is always placed in one of the city's square. This way the community reveals its existence and belonging to the whole Klaipėda society. The important historical dates (such as Jewish Genocide or others) are commemorated in the territory of community. Representatives of Klaipėda city and district authorities, delegated individuals from communities of other ethnic minorities, other active Klaipėda citizens use to take place in these events:

Every year the community organizes events for Klaipėda people. Bring concerts and performances. Entry is almost free. [...]. We do this all for citizens. [...]. We take part in national festivals. [Informant No. 8.]

[...] The Jewish community is integrated into whole Klaipėda's community. We are indistinguishable. Those problems, which exist in our society, concern each of us. [Informant No. 2.]

The community cooperates with governmental and non-governmental organizations and stay in close touch with the communities of other national minorities.

It can be stated, that Klaipėda Jewish Community integrates into social life of contemporary Klaipėda.

Conception of Self-consciousness Definitions

On the one hand, ethnicity is rather clear, when it is associated with one nation – when the Jewish is related with Judaism as a religion and the way of life. However, it does not correspond to the conception of nation, when the latter is identified with territory, language, cultural environment and development. As a result of having been living under the conditions of Diaspora, Jews speak different languages and follow the different cultural traditions. The big communities have centuries-long experiences of cultural development. Under those conditions *Ashkenazi* and *Sefards* were formed, and some new races appeared, for example Jews-Ethiopians.

The Klaipėda's Jews call themselves *Ashkenazi* (i.e. the successors and descendants of West Europe, concretely – Germany Jews cultural heritage). The majority of Lithuanian Jews – *Litvak* (in which even few individuals remain), is composed of the Jews, arrived from Russia, other former allied republics, also from South Europe and North Africa countries.

The members of Klaipėda's Jewish community attribute themselves to a trend of the traditional Rabbinical Orthodox Judaism, typical to *Litvak*.

Here, in Klaipėda, there are no traditions. We create such traditions. It is not good, but we haven't got any another way out. There is Lithuania, there are Lithuanian traditions, and we pray not from heart. [...]. We try to treat ourselves *Litvaks* community and this is it. [Informant No. 1.]

The relations with other Judaism trends are described as tolerant. *Chassids* (religious branch, formed in the 18th century, now attributing to the Orthodox Judaism trend), who want to join our community, are accepted with pleasure:

Relations are tolerant. One family would like to enter our community, they are Chassid. Pray, we are the Jews. There is a law that regulates what can be done, what not. There is no point to argue. [Informant No. 1.]

The individuals, being questioned, diversely reveal their awareness of who the Jew is, and who is not:

A human being was said to be a Jew in his childhood. And then he found out that. [Informant No. 10., taking part in social support activities].

[...] A Jew is not only the one who was born as a Jew, but also the one who becomes a Jew. A Jew is the one who was born from a Jewish mother. But to become a Jew needs numerous preparations, it must be a conscious step. It happens rarely. [Informant No. 7].

[...] We have a law. The law clearly defines who a Jew is. The one Jew is who was born from a Jewish mother. Another Jew is who became a Jew after accomplishing a certain procedure, called *gijur*. Everything is simple [...]. Person has to make his own decision, who is he. [...]. There is one saying: A Jew is not the one, whose mother is a Jew, but the one whose children and grandchildren are Jews. [Informant No. 1.]

[...] We are different and that helped us to survive. [Informant No. 5., being participated in re-establishment of community]

The Jewish conception is diverse, determined by personal experience and religious knowledge. However, awareness of oneness, separation of their nation from others is observed.

Questions, related to Jewish conception, are complicated. Although universally accepted definitions are known for the members of Klaipėda's Jewish community, the majority of them do not pursue Jewish lifestyle, do not know Jewish laws, are poorly acquainted with national traditions, and even not all of them are born from a Jewish mother, but all consider themselves Jewish. Jewish issues of self-awareness are complex and require additional researches of identity. In the present article the other objective was raised, and the problem of Jewish self-identification was dealt with only by referring to the aspects of community's development, survival and continuity, also, pursuing to reveal and highlight a separate field of further researches.

Conclusions

Short historical developmental review of Jewish community's formation and re-establishment in Klaipėda has revealed that the first Jews settled in Klaipėda in 15th – 16th centuries, but a more numerous Jewish community originated only in 19th century. In different periods of city's development the number of Klaipėda's Jewish community fluctuated from 200 to 900 people. The Jews

of Klaipėda had a tendency to subdivide into separate communities. It is known that in Klaipėda the Jews came from Germany and from Russia belonged to different communities and attended separate synagogues. The Polish Jews also had their own synagogue. In interwar period the fourth well-known synagogue in Klaipėda city was opened. It was called as “Synagogue of Intelligent”.

Today the Klaipėda's Jewish community consists of two communities. The Klaipėda's Jewish community was re-established and registered in 1989. The Religious Jewish community in Klaipėda was officially registered in 1997. The rise of Klaipėda's Religious Jewish community was influenced by the laws of Lithuania, which allowed only the religious communities to claim for the reversionary property. Every community has its president; however, the same members comprise communities. The informants, being questioned, indicate that formally two communities exist; however, when answering to the questions, they usually use a general pronoun of *the Jewish community*. It can be stated that both communities are perceived as parts of one community that are responsible for particular activities.

At present 300 Jews, the majority of whom are Russian-speaking people or elderly people, arrived from various former allied republics of Soviet Union after the Second World War, are registered as members of the community. *Litvaks*, emigrated from Lithuania, or their descendants comprise only a few in amount. Jewish descendants from Prussian period are not presented in contemporary Klaipėda.

The survival issue is relevant to the Klaipėda's Jewish community. Expressed statements clearly reveal concern about demographic situation, community's continuity and future perspectives. However, it is also indicated that despite migration and natural alternation, the number of community members has been stable for two decades.

After analyzing community's activities, it has become clear that community reflects the basic needs of the local Jews. Educative, religious and social support activities are being actively performed. The Klaipėda's Jewish community is integrating into social life of Klaipėda: it cooperates with public and non-governmental organizations, maintains close relations with communities of other ethnical minorities, organises various events for all citizens.

The members of Klaipėda Jewish community attribute themselves to a religious trend of traditional Rabbinical Orthodox Judaism, typical to *Litvak*. The persons, being interviewed, outline their perception, who is a Jew, different way. The questions are influenced by personal experience and religious knowledge. However, awareness of oneness, separation of one's nation from others, feeling of Jewish identity are also observed.

References

- ATAMUKAS, Solomonas. Lietuvos žydų kelias. Nuo XIV amžiaus iki XX a. pabaigos. Vilnius: Alma littera, 2001.
- BITINAS, Bronislovas, RUPŠIENĖ, Liudmila, ŽYDŽIŪNAITĖ, Vilma. Kokybinių tyrimų metodologija. Klaipėda, 2009.
- EIDINTAS, Alfonsas. Lietuvos žydų žudynių byla: dokumentų ir straipsnių rinkinys. Vilnius: Vaga, 2001.
- KIBELKA, Ruth. Klaipėdos ir Šilutės žydai XIX amžiuje. In: Baltija 2001. Klaipėda: Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla, 2001.
- LEISEROWITZ, Ruth. Die Illusion der transmigratorischen Existenz. Juden im Memel des 20. Jahrhunderts. Neue Folge Band X / 2001. Nordost-Institut Lüneburg, 2002.
- LUKOŠIŪTĖ, Sandra. Žydų bendruomenėje daugiau advokatų nei menininkų. Vakarų ekspresas, 2006 11 24.
- ROSIN, Joseph. Klaipėda (Memel). <<http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/memel/memel2.html>> [last visit: March 14, 2008].
- RULF, J. Zur Geschichte der Juden in Memel. Bonn, 1900.
- VAREIKIS, Vyngantas. Klaipėda XX amžiuje. Klaipėda: Menininkų namai, 1993.
- TATORIS, Jonas. Senoji Klaipėda. Urbanistinė raida ir architektūra iki 1939 metų. Vilnius: Mokslas, 1994.
- VILEIŠIS, Vincas. Tautiniai santykiai Mažojoje Lietuvoje ligi Didžiojo karo istorijos ir statistikos šviesoje. Politinių ir socialinių mokslų instituto leidinys, Nr. 3. Kaunas, 1935.
- VISOCKYTĖ, Ramunė. Išsigelbėjimo šiaudas – Izraelis. Vakarų ekspresas, 1991 02 19.

VORGRIMLER, Herbert. Naujasis teologijos žodynas. Kaunas: Katalikų interneto tarnyba, 2003.

ZEMBRICKIS, Johanas. Klaipėdos karališkojo Prūsijos jūrų ir prekybos miesto istorija. T. 1. Klaipėda: Libra Memelensis, 2002 (the 1st edition – Klaipėda, 1902).

ZEMBRICKIS, Johanas. Klaipėda XIX amžiuje. T. 2. Klaipėda: Libra Memelensis, 2004 (the 1st edition – Klaipėda, 1904).

KLAIPĖDOS ŽYDŲ BENDRUOMENĖ: IŠLIKIMAS, KAITA, TĘSTINUMAS

Sada Petružienė

Klaipėdos universitetas, Edukacinių inovacijų centras

Santrauka

Klaipėdos miestas su savo unikalia istorine raida visada buvo daugiatautis. Tai vienas iš ryškiausių šio miesto ypatumų. Klaipėdos žydų bendruomenė turi savo istoriją, kuri skaičiuojama nuo XV–XVI a., ir unikalią situaciją lyginant ją su kitomis žydų diasporos Lietuvoje bendruomenėmis ar žydų diaspora kitose šalyse.

Studijų apie istorinę Klaipėdos žydų bendruomenės raidą nėra daug, tačiau dabartinė jos situacija, socialinės kaitos, bendruomenės išlikimo ir savimonės formavimosi problemos yra nenagrinėtos. Nėra atsakyta ir į probleminį klausimą – kas turi įtakos žydų tautinių bendruomenių išlikimui, tęstinumui bei kaitai ir kaip visa tai yra susiję su regiono specifika. Šiuo aspektu straipsnyje analizuojama problema yra nauja ir neištirta. Kita vertus, Klaipėdos žydų bendruomenės kaitos ir integracijos problemos aktualumas yra akivaizdus tiek istoriniu, tiek ir antropologiniu požiūriu. Straipsnio tikslas – išanalizuoti Klaipėdos žydų bendruomenės išlikimo, kaitos bei tęstinumo ypatybes specifinės regiono istorinės raidos kontekste ir atskleisti bendruomenės narių žydiškosios savimonės sampratos pokyčius.

Straipsnyje pateikiama trumpa Klaipėdos žydų bendruomenės istorija.

Atliekant empirinį tyrimą yra taikoma etnografinė pažinimo strategija, individualaus kryptingojo, iš dalies – struktūruoto interviu forma. Duomenys rinkti, nagrinėti ir apibendrinti šių temų lygmeniu: Klaipėdos žydų bendruomenės išlikimo problematika; bendruomenės kaita, demografiniai rodikliai ir bendruomeninė veikla; tęstinumas / ateities perspektyvų įžvalgos; savimonės sampratos raida.

Šiandien Klaipėdoje yra žinomos dvi žydų bendruomenės. Pirmoji – Klaipėdos žydų bendruomenė, atkurta ir įregistruota 1989 m. Antroji – Klaipėdos religinė žydų bendruomenė, oficialiai įregistruota 1997 m. Jos atsiradimui įtakos turėjo Lietuvos įstatymai, į gražinamą turtą leidę pretenduoti tik religinėms bendruomenėms. Kiekviena bendruomenė turi savo pirmininką, bet abi bendruomenės sudaro tie patys nariai. Apklaustieji respondentai nurodo, kad formaliai yra dvi bendruomenės, bet atsakydami į pateikiamus klausimus dažniausiai vartoja bendrą sąvoką žydų bendruomenė. Galime teigti, kad abi bendruomenės yra suvokiamos kaip vienos bendruomenės dalys, atsakingos už tam tikrą konkrečią veiklą.

Šiuo metu bendruomenėje yra užsiregistravę apie 300 asmenų. Didžioji jų dalis – rusakalbiai, garbaus amžiaus žmonės, atvykę į Klaipėdą po Antrojo pasaulinio karo iš įvairių tuometinės Sovietų Sąjungos respublikų. Atsikėlusius iš Lietuvos litvakų ar jų palikuonių yra vos keletas asmenų. Prūsijos laikotarpio Klaipėdos žydų palikuonių nėra.

Klaipėdos žydų bendruomenei yra aktuali jos išlikimo problema. Pasisakymuose aiškiai išreikštas susirūpinimas demografinė padėtimi, bendruomenės tęstinumu ir ateities perspektyvomis.

Tačiau taip pat nurodoma, kad nepaisant migracijos ir natūralios kaitos, bendruomenės narių skaičius yra stabilus jau du dešimtmečius.

Analizuojant bendruomenės veiklą paaiškėjo, kad bendruomenė realizuoja vietinių žydų poreikius. Aktyviai vykdoma švietėjiška, religinė, socialinės paramos veikla.

Klaipėdos žydų bendruomenė integruojasi į Klaipėdos visuomeninį gyvenimą: bendradarbiauja su valstybinėmis ir nevyriausybinėmis organizacijomis, palaiko glaudžius ryšius su kitų tautinių mažumų bendruomenėmis, rengia įvairius renginius miesto visuomenei.

Klaipėdos žydų bendruomenės nariai save priskiria litvakams būdingai tradicinio rabinistinio ortodoksio judaizmo religinei kryptčiai.

Apklausti asmenys įvairiai nusako savo sampratą, kas yra žydas. Jų atsakymai yra lemiami asmeninės ir religinio pažinimo patirties. Kita vertus, čia pastebimas ir etninio išskirtinumo momentas, t. y. aiškus savo tautos atskyrimas nuo kitų tautų bei žydiškosios tapatybės pajauta.