

Theses of Phd dissertacion

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**Because this is the place where our
memory will live on
The history of Jewry in the streets of
Szabadka**

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Formulation of the scientific problem

Central (Eastern) European Jewish local historiography in the late modern period started at the same time as the political emancipation of the Jewish community. The two phenomena, their processes and evolution have followed parallel paths.

Local historiography is (was) meant to support the political emancipation of the religious community. It has been the representation and apologia of the community towards the majority society, and, at the same time, it has addressed the members of the community, too: works have been meant to serve as paragons, ideals and books of examples. Tension resulting from a compulsion to conform is prevalent in these works. They are meant to prove that Jews are at least as noble, humane, sophisticated and patriotic as any other member of the society they live in. (The creation of) self-tension does not stop here, authors use every opportunity to compare the two entities and show that considering its size and opportunities, the Jewish community is even better educated and does more good, exceeding the local or national average. These works of local history pose (and create) tension within the Jewish community, too. They act as books of examples or catalogues and tell the readers this is what they need to achieve at the

level of the individual as well. Then they add that the benevolent country that has been merciful enough to accept the Jewish community not only deserves this, but expects this, this is what the community owes the majority.

Over the past 150 years, various periods have come and gone, but (self)-affirmation and the desire to conform have accompanied (and haunted) Jewish local historiography like determined aunts, maintaining tension. Like it happens in proper families.

Over these past 150 years, points of reference and affirmation have changed, but the elements listed above have always been present.

In my thesis I wish to answer the following questions:

- What does local historiography tell us if we place events in historical spaces and we do not single out a group just because it is a religious community,
- i.e. we make a conscious decision not to use terms like Jewish house, Jewish doctor, and similar segregating and philosemitic expressions;
- What does local historiography tell us if we examine a community in its ‘natural habitat’, exploring how

members of the community behave, how they interact, what activities they pursue and what interpersonal relations they have?

And finally: does a Jewish Szabadka exist? Or any other Szabadka defined by national, religious, political or other characteristics? Or is there only one Szabadka, where *the Sun shines equally on everyone*?

Research objectives and methods

The corpus of my thesis is meant to be getting gradually narrower and more focused in space and in its topic. As a starting point, I explore the city. I believe it is important to provide an overview of the history of Szabadka, because a historical perspective is important if you want to understand context and interactions. This is followed by the history of the local Jewish community.

History is written through everyday activities by politics and the political elite, within the restrictions created by the bureaucracy of the state administration and within the internal and external limits provided by legislation, and influenced by economic interests; through this boundaries are also laid down for individuals who are led by their religious beliefs and the lodestar of moral norms while they respect the social roles that have evolved. History evolves in this space in the long term, through these individual processes. Interactions take place in real spaces: in outdoor spaces created by objects in nature, and in indoor spaces, behind the facades of built structures. The next unit of the thesis discusses space as a historical factor, and describes the significance of sacred spaces. Before I discuss Jewish space as a historical space

specifically, I provide a brief analysis of the space structure and the history of the local house numbering system; it is through the districts and house numbers that you can place individual characters in specific physical space.

I defined zero points for both the political space in Szabadka and the Jewish space in Szabadka. These *zero kilometre markers* are focal points; thanks to the interactions they act as centres of gravity, and they are also reference points in everyday life.

Following the political tradition that defines the Jewish community on Hungarian land as a religious and not an ethnic community, I looked for the sources (drivers) of the zero, primary and secondary points of the Jewry in religious rules and tradition, and I created them along these.

Due to the limited length of my thesis, I could not discuss the Jewish community of the whole inner area (city). I examine and present the Jewish community through the example of Petőfi Sándor Street, where community members participate in urban spaces, live their life and interact with other urban residents.

My research focuses on the era of the Dual Monarchy. As historical periods are defined arbitrarily and in everyday life the start and the end of these periods are not marked by the chime of the clock or the tolling of the bells, when I examine specific events, I also examine the context and the previous period. In my analysis of the space and in spatial stories, I start from the present conditions, and sometimes I mention periods that came after the strictly defined research period to facilitate understanding.

The thesis focuses on the situation(s) of the Jewish community in Szabadka. When I first mention a member of the community examined, I use the denotation (Isr); I did not want to artificially segregate any person in the text, so I only use this. As I wish to explore interpersonal networks, too, I used the → symbol of encyclopaedias by the persons whose life is described in detail in the thesis.

Summary conclusions

The study focuses on the residents of Petőfi Sándor Street. At the beginning of the modern era, this street was not an integral part of the city centre, but as the population grew rapidly, it was urbanised at the end of the 18th century. Those who live in Szabadka or visit the city, would not know how significant this street once was, even besides the fact that here is the secondary grammar school where Dezső KOSZTOLÁNYI spent his secondary school years. The wealthiest citizens and members of parliament used to live here.

Among the people living in the area examined, I did not find significant ethnic or religious segregation or clusters. Similarly, urban and technological development cannot be segregated for the members of any religious or ethnic community: pavements, street lighting, the sewage system, the electricity grid etc.—these were equally accessible for everyone living there.

When we examine the construction of the houses of inner city residents, in the architectural style (ornamentation), the size and the arrangement of inner spaces there are no signs of the religious affiliation or ethnic identity of those who lived in these homes or had them built. Housing-related habits may

be affected by the occupation of the residents: those who owned large lands lived here from autumn to spring, and in summer they stayed in their manor and their holiday home in Palics (Palić). People of certain professions (e.g., doctors and lawyers) often had their office in their home, but separated from their living quarters (in another wing, usually). Most of these buildings have at least two storeys. Most often stores were on the ground level and living quarters were on the upper level. In the case of multi-storey buildings, almost always there were rented dwellings on the upper level or in the whole building.

In the area examined, the Jewish people of Szabadka do not have their distinctive attitudes or habits. They have the same interactions and take part in the same interactions as all the other residents downtown. This is true for the residents who belong to any other denomination as well. People build new homes, have children, weddings and funerals take place in their families, they are successful in their pursuits or perhaps less so, they play hard or live a quiet life, they go to the theatre and community events, they practise their faith, they are involved in lawsuits and sometimes in duels. My claim that examining the Jewry separately is a mistake is confirmed by

this research result. Similarly, it is proven that positive discrimination (a group is smarter, richer, more diligent) is also mistaken, as no such thing can be shown for any group of urban residents.

The study also clearly shows that expressions that are embedded in local historiography in the Carpathian Basin, expressions treated as dogmas or totems like Jewish house or Jewish doctor do not exist in real life. In my study, I did not find any sign or motif to confirm this set or network of expressions and groupings.

The study reveals that religious affiliation (in this case the Jewish faith) is not visible in everyday activities. Religious affiliation is mentioned in some conflicts, but in those cases, it is used as a curse word. There is another case where religion plays a role: on certain platforms of public life where people are engaged, like women's associations, the charitable events of such associations, donations, the Jewish hospital, patronage etc. These are the secondary (and not necessarily real) Jewish spaces where the drive or basic principle is rooted in religious rules or tradition, but it serves the public good. For men, being a member of the religious community's leadership does not involve active engagement, it is only a

matter of social prestige. The same can be established about the similar forums of the Serbian Greek Orthodox community and later the Protestant communities. In the case of the Catholic church, there is no such distinctive social presence. We could mention the Bunjevac societies, but these are ethnic, not religious organisations. Catholic gentlewomen are engaged in urban women's associations that are not affiliated with religious communities.

While the Shoah did not happen in the examined period, it can still be concluded that the claim that the history of a Jewish community should not be written with the Shoah as the starting point is true. The examined period shows that at this time, no-one thought about persecution, discrimination and genocide. Just like history does not know about *what would have happened if...* statements, the citizens in the examined period were not influenced by any period other than their own and they were not concerned with *what would happen if...* questions, either. The claim I made at the beginning of my thesis that the history of a community cannot be written with the Shoah as the starting point and that a community is not only characterised by the Holocaust, has now been proven.

The area examined is an integral part of the city centre, which means that the persons presented are typical downtown residents: educated, well-off people who consume cultural goods. This is not a true image of the whole population of Szabadka or the whole Jewry of Szabadka. While not intentionally, but it is the history of an elite group whose everyday life and interactions are reconstructed and presented. It would be almost impossible to conduct similar research on the outskirts of town: there is no uniform urban planning, most properties were not registered (as they were not brick buildings), and as for the residents, their low level of education and their lack of active participation in the economy and in politics meant that no documents were generated about them.

The study focuses on the period that started in the 1860s and 1870s and lasted until 1920. The results describe the social landscape of this era.

When projected to the Jewish community, this picture can only be generalised to a certain extent, as this is the description of the inner city elite that is active in political, economic and public life—this is not the image of the whole community. This is a group that belongs to the Hungarian

Neolog community, and beyond that, everyday life happens in a religiously and ethnically diverse environment.

With my thesis, I wish to point out that a paradigm shift is needed in denominational local historiography to draw a more balanced and more comprehensive picture. It is important to get rid of clichés. As Nils Nilson asks *Will you have a past John Kovacs?*, denominational local historians must be committed to writing the story of every John Kovacs. I believe that you can see the details the big picture is made of if you break down society to the level of individuals.

A new scientific result

In reality, there is only one Szabadka. There is no Christian or Jewish, Catholic or Protestant, Hungarian or Serbian or Croatian Bunjevac Szabadka. There is no right-wing or left-wing or pro-government town. Szabadka is made up of its citizens, and when their stories are put together, the history of the city is born. Szabadka has no origin or end story: it is a centuries-long process in which individuals (citizens) appear and disappear. There is no collective flashlight and no panoramic photo.

There is no Jewish history in Szabadka and there is no history of a Jewish Szabadka. There is no point in segregating a community based on its religious affiliation and examining it separately. In his everyday life, Izidor MILKÓ did not want to be a part of Szabadka's Jewish history. First and foremost, he was a citizen of Szabadka, who was dispossessed by the city's administration, but it was exactly because of his local patriotism that no lawsuit was brought. He worked as a journalist and an author. He played a (real or perceived) role in social, religious and economic societies. He worked for assimilation with the Hungarian society; he was a peacetime Neolog: a Hungarian patriot and a faithful Jew. Jewish

Szabadka would have a history if Jewish Izidor MILKÓ had a story. But the fact that he wanted a new, ornate and grand temple is not a unique manifestation of religious feelings. Neither is the fact that he had (or would have had) Kosher food, had a Mezuzah by his door and kept the Sabbath.

If we segregate Izidor MILKÓ'S story, we create a separate history. Every reconstruction draws on reality, but because assumptions are made, it never stands firmly on the ground, it floats or at least it limps. But separate history is more fiction than reality.

It can be discussed, and processes can be studied why Jewish people in Szabadka like(d) so much to live in district 6 and why it was rare that they lived next door or in the same street as Serbian Bunjevac families.

There are no weighty Jewish stories from Szabadka that could make up a collective story. If Jewish Szabadka has no history, Jewish Szabadka is fictional. It is a marketing brand, a 'curiosity' of local history, a tourist attraction. But it is not history. Only Szabadka has a history. And that history does not allow for separate histories.

List of scientific publications related to the topic of the doctoral candidate

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7. NEGYELA László Márk, DÉVAVÁRI Zoltán(szerk.);*Ó, ti szabadkai szép napok! Oh, you beautiful days of Szabadka!*, Budapest : ZuckerMűvek Kft. 2021.
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11. NEGYELA László Márk, *Иконографија синагоге на Трпу Јакоба и Комора у Суботици*, in *Ex Pannonia*, (24), 2020, p. 52-61.
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13. NEGYELA László, *Itt élnek Halbrohrék: Halbrohr Tamással Negyela László Márk beszélgetett*, in *Bácsország*, 2014, p. 56-63.
14. PROTIC, Marko; NEGYELA László Márk (szerk.), *Szabadka aranykora*, Szabadka : Minerva Könyvképző (MILKO), 2022.

Professional-scientific biography of the doctoral candidate

László NEGYELA was born in 1984 in Szabadka. He earned a bachelor's degree in community organization at the National Rabbinical Training School - Jewish University, and a master's degree in cultural heritage at the University of Pécs. His research topics are sacred architecture and heritage protection, the local, urban and cadastral history of Szabadka. He is the editor of the periodicals *Bácsmegyei Napló* and *Az Úr építi*.