

August 14, 2020



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Remissvar: Holocaust Museum in Sweden/Sveriges museum om Förintelsen (SOU 2020:21)

Judisk Kultur i Sverige (J!) supports the commission's recommendation of an independent, new institution - *The Holocaust Museum in Sweden*

Temporary housing

J! supports the idea that until the new Holocaust museum is built and opened, an interim venue should be used. J! recommends that an existing state museum is designated for that purpose. A possible choice would be Historiska Museet in Stockholm. Under the auspices of that state museum, a designated group of researchers, historians, curators and producers would collect, store, host and display relevant material eventually to become part of the permanent museum: images, written material, films, testimonies, artefacts, Swedish Dimensions in Testimony – DiT (in process, please see below) installation. All that should be carried out in close dialogue and cooperation with the hosting institution. Funding should be allocated to the hosting institution throughout the process and until the Holocaust Museum in Sweden opens its doors.

An alternative: part of an existing institution

J! supports the idea that if for any reason the independent Holocaust Museum in Sweden cannot have its own physical premises, it should be built in an existing state museum. In that case, the Holocaust Museum in Sweden could be adjacent to the state museum but still operate as an independent entity with its own directors, board and funds. As mentioned above, Historiska Museet in Stockholm would be a choice that we would support.

The role of research in the Museum

J! supports the idea that the Holocaust Museum in Sweden should also serve as a research center, conduct its own research and have researchers on its staff. It should also interact with international Holocaust research centra and institutions that specifically work for the learning, teaching and preserving the memory of the Shoah (Yad va'Shem, USC Shoah Foundation, for example).

J! supports the recommendation that the work process regarding the contents of the new museum - collecting material, documentation and production of the permanent exhibition - is carried out by and with researchers.

J! asserts that the Holocaust Museum should be just that - a museum about the Holocaust that provides knowledge about Jewish life in Europe before WW2, the rise of the Third Reich, antisemitism and race ideology, WW2, The Holocaust, Sweden during WW2, survivors in Sweden in the aftermath of WW2.

J! supports the idea that the Holocaust Museum in Sweden should include and present the narrative of Holocaust survivors who built their lives in Sweden in the aftermath of WW2, including the narrative of those who made it to Sweden but died upon arrival and are buried in Swedish soil.

J! asserts that the target groups for the Holocaust Museum in Sweden should be broad, and that the Museum would be relevant and important for a general, knowledge-seeking audience. Special programs and focus should be given to pupils, students and classes who will visit the Museum as part of the school curriculum.

J! asserts that the Holocaust Museum should be built in Stockholm, Sweden's capital.

J! asserts that the Holocaust Museum in Sweden should include the following on its premises:

- Permanent exhibition
- Testimonial archive
- Collection of artefacts
- The interactive installation Dimensions in Testimony – DiT (in process, please see below)
- Space for visiting exhibitions
- Hall for lectures, discussions, film screening, culture events. It should be spacious enough to accommodate a few school classes at a time.
- Research center
- Library
- Information center
- Book store
- Café/restaurant
- Amenities

J! and Holocaust Remembrance

In J!'s recommendation to Professor Birgitta Svensson submitted in November 2019, the urgency in turning the vision of the Holocaust Museum in Sweden into reality was stressed. Unfortunately, Max Safir, the Holocaust survivor who personally approached Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and brought to his awareness the necessity of having a Holocaust Museum in Sweden passed away on June 9, 2020. J! remembers the Prime Minister's public promise to Max Safir made in Stockholm's Stora Synagoga on January 27, 2019, that a Holocaust Museum will be built in Sweden (2.3).

J! continues to stress the urgency of this errand and hence strongly suggests that an interim solution is adopted and made public immediately.

Hoping that all remaining Swedish Holocaust survivors would have the possibility to enter the newly built Holocaust Museum in Sweden is wishful thinking, but we must all strive for them to at least have a chance to witness the putting down of the stepping stone of the new museum, to witness the progress of the creation of the Holocaust Museum and to have the possibility of visiting the interim premises that host it until the final institution is complete.

J! has been working throughout the years with arranging numerous seminars, film screenings, debates and culture programs that focus on the Holocaust, Holocaust Remembrance, Holocaust aesthetic manifestations and the challenges in forwarding the memory of the Shoah to future generations, while guarding it from being trivialized and relativized.

At a time of growing revisionism and Holocaust denial - probably and regretfully sure to increase once the survivors are no longer among us – it is extremely important to teach historical facts about the Holocaust. Teaching about WW2, the Third Reich, the Holocaust and its survivors should be the outmost and only priority of any Holocaust Museum. Historical facts about the Shoah should not be diffused or tilted to accommodate other agendas. The facts and implications of the extermination of Europe's Jews should be told. The important role that the Jewish minority played in society and in the building of modernity should be part of such narrative. The big hole that the Holocaust left in Europe should be discussed. The uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust and, at the same time, its universal aspects, should be taught and highlighted. Still, making it all relevant to contemporary society and to the challenges it is facing, telling about the genocide of fellow groups and other human beings by the Nazis and about other atrocities around the world, is of course important and could be done for instance through seminars and culture programs. The survivors themselves advocate the importance of guarding democracy and protect democratic institutions. However, the Museum should, pro primo, be a Holocaust Museum, a place for acquiring knowledge about that dark era, with a permanent exhibition that makes available testimonies, artefacts and images.

Speaking Memories – The Last Witnesses of the Holocaust

As a result of national and international efforts, tight cooperation and strong determination, J!'s exhibition *Speaking Memories -The Last Witnesses of the Holocaust* (Historiska Museet 25/1 2019 - 8/12 2019) had more than 50,000 visitors in Stockholm alone, received extensive media coverage and response. Following Stockholm, the exhibition opened in Värmlands Museum (25/1 2020) and recently in Malmö Museer (13/6 2020). It will be open at Västerbottens museum in the fall of 2021.

That type of initiative and project, led by J! and Historiska Museet in cooperation with Föreningen Förintelsens Överlevande i Sverige, USC Shoah Foundation and Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, was realized for the first time in Sweden. More importantly, the exhibition with testimonial archive, artefacts from Auschwitz-Birkenau, an interactive installation (DiT, again please see below), information about the Holocaust and its survivors in Sweden, was presented for the first time in Sweden *in a state museum*. It gave a clear message that the Holocaust is part of Swedish history and strengthened the idea of how important it is to have a Holocaust Museum in Sweden.

In Stockholm J! witnessed how meaningful the exhibition was for the survivors *and* the general audience, pupils and students in particular. The Holocaust survivors and their families, children and grandchildren visited the exhibition time and again. Some, as Max Safir, visited it every day and interacted with the general audience. Other survivors found comfort and a sense of security just by knowing that the exhibition was there, that their story is publicly told, that their testimonies are heard; that there is a space for and about them.

The survivors were glad to see *Speaking Memories* travelling to other parts of Sweden, but at the same time expressed their regret that the exhibition had to be taken away from Historiska Museet in Stockholm. Knowing that there is a permanent place giving the narrative of the Holocaust and its survivors, a place that made available the 55,000 testimonies archive for the general audience – a result of the tight cooperation with USC Shoah Foundation – is a kind of security and could not be compared with any previous initiative in Sweden. Not only was it appreciated by the general, knowledge-seeking visitors; it also meant a great deal to those who were looking for testimonies given by their relatives and it also offered great comfort to the survivors. Finally.

Based on that overwhelming experience, J! firmly believes that a Holocaust Museum in Sweden is a most relevant and important institution. Further, should that Museum be part of an existing institution, from J!'s experience Historiska Museet would be a most suitable institution to host it. That would emphasize that the Holocaust is part of Swedish history and not a remote event.

2020 Swedish Dimensions in Testimony (DiT)

Dimensions in Testimony is a collection of 3D interactive genocide survivor **testimonies**, produced by **USC Shoah Foundation** in order to preserve the conversational experience of asking survivors questions about their life and hearing responses in real time, therefore preserving history through first-person narrative.

J! has been working closely throughout the years with USC Shoah Foundation and with Historiska Museet. It continues to do so, as these three institutions implement the Swedish version of the interactive installation Dimensions in Testimony with survivors Elisabeth Citrom (b. 1931, Transylvania) and Tobias Rawet (b. 1936, Poland). J! is curator and co-producer of the installation, with one of the signatories below, Lizzie Scheja, being the interviewer and responsible for pre-production process of research and supervision. Historiska Museet is the production manager, responsible for the capturing process and the eventual testing of the installation. The DiT installation is implemented under the auspices of and with licence from USC Shoah Foundation – a prerequisite for the entire process. Our three institutions work tightly together to realize this huge project. Naturally, we would like to see Swedish DiT as part of the permanent exhibition in the future Holocaust Museum in Sweden. Our experience from presenting DiT at Historiska Museet throughout

2019 was extremely positive. It gave an added value to the experience that the exhibition offered, with overwhelmingly positive reactions from the visitors. Whilst nothing can replace a live interaction with a survivor, this installation still enables the visitors to converse with survivors and receive answers to their questions.

The Swedish DiT is funded by private donors. It has also received generous funds in the sum of 2.3m kronor from the Swedish government.

J! is grateful for the opportunity to be a referral body in this important instance and looks forward to further engaging in the making of the Holocaust Museum in Sweden a reality.

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