

Project “Restoration of Ludza Great Synagogue and Revival of Jews Spiritual Heritage” has completed

A month has passed since the historical building of Ludza Synagogue opened its doors for visitors. On the 11th of August members of Ludza Jewish society, Ludza inhabitants, representatives of Latvian Jewish parishes and guests from Israel gathered together for its opening event. The restoration results were highly evaluated by Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Israel Ms. Lironne Bar-Sadeh, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Norway Mr Steinar Egil Hagen, representatives of the Embassy of the United States of America, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Culture.



Photo: Ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway Mr Steinar Egil Hagen at the opening event

Since the opening event more than 1600 visitors have come to see the formidable changes in the synagogue after the restoration. It is not difficult to understand this interest, because Ludza Synagogue is the oldest wooden synagogue in the Baltic Sea region. The building reminds the oldest synagogues in Europe, which were built in the 11th century – it has got a dome and it is painted as starred sky in the interior. In the Latvian historical archives it is mentioned that Ludza Synagogue was built in 1800 as a wooden building, which in the third quarter of the 19th century was covered with clay bricks due to technical problems. Dendrochronological dating done in 2015 proved the rareness of the original wooden

construction details of the synagogue, and it was discovered that it was built in about 1781-1782 (analysis done by Dr.biol. Māris Zunde).

Since 1990s the synagogue has not been used, the situation sharply worsened and in 2013 the building was in crucial condition, the interior was demolished, and there was a collapse risk. In 2014 in order to preserve the cultural and historical heritage and to ensure access to qualitative culture services for the society Ludza Municipality launched project "Restoration of Ludza Great Synagogue and Revival of Jews Spiritual Heritage". Its principal activities were restoration of the synagogue, creation of expositions, trainings and experience exchange for Latvian craftsmen in cooperation with project partners – the Museum Centre in Hordaland (Norway).



Photo: Project participants and partners from the Museum Centre in Hordaland

After the restoration the synagogue kept its original image, architectonic composition of façade, the wooden constructions and authentic planning of premises. Foundation of the building was reinforced, the exterior walls were restored, the red bricks were dismantled, and the log walls were insulated and covered with wooden planks. Cold pressed linseed oil paint was used for painting the façade wooden parts. Restorers preserved the historical tin-plate roof dating back to the 1930s; the wooden roof constructions were reinforced. The small wooden annex with steps was dismantled, new basement was built and the annex was restored using authentic materials. Historical window cases were restored, also in the praying room. The authentic door to the Women's department was preserved. The rest of the window sets and doors were made brand new using the historical templates.



Photo: The restored synagogue

The interior also underwent imposing restoration works: the unique wooden plank dome in the praying room was preserved with its paper covering and tin six-ray stars in the centre. On the first floor in the women's department the authentic plank floor was restored. At the entrance, restorers constructed brick floor made of the dismantled wall bricks. On the ground floor new boards were used, three stoves were made. About 65% of the authentic wall coating was preserved, paint layers were reinforced, polychromic fragments were saved and partly restored (restorers Lolita Hermsa, Maija Tirzīte, Vineta Geida, Natālija Jātniece, Daiga Krūze, Thorsten Herms).



Photo: A part of the exposition on the first floor

The restored synagogue will be a branch of Ludza Museum. The Museum created four different expositions showing history, religion and culture of Jewish people who used to live in Ludza.

On the ground floor you can see a styled photo workshop devoted to photographer Wolf Frank and his son – world famous documentary film maker Hertz Frank.



Photo: An exposition on the ground floor

Local inhabitants took part in creation of the exposition related to history of Ludza Jewish community; they donated some household objects and photos. In the large praying hall visitors can see unique Jewish cult objects dating back to the 18th – 19th centuries – *Bimah* and *Torah Arc (Aron Kodesh* – the cabinet where Torah scrolls are kept), reading desks and benches. Craftsman Andris Prikulis restored these precious authentic objects.

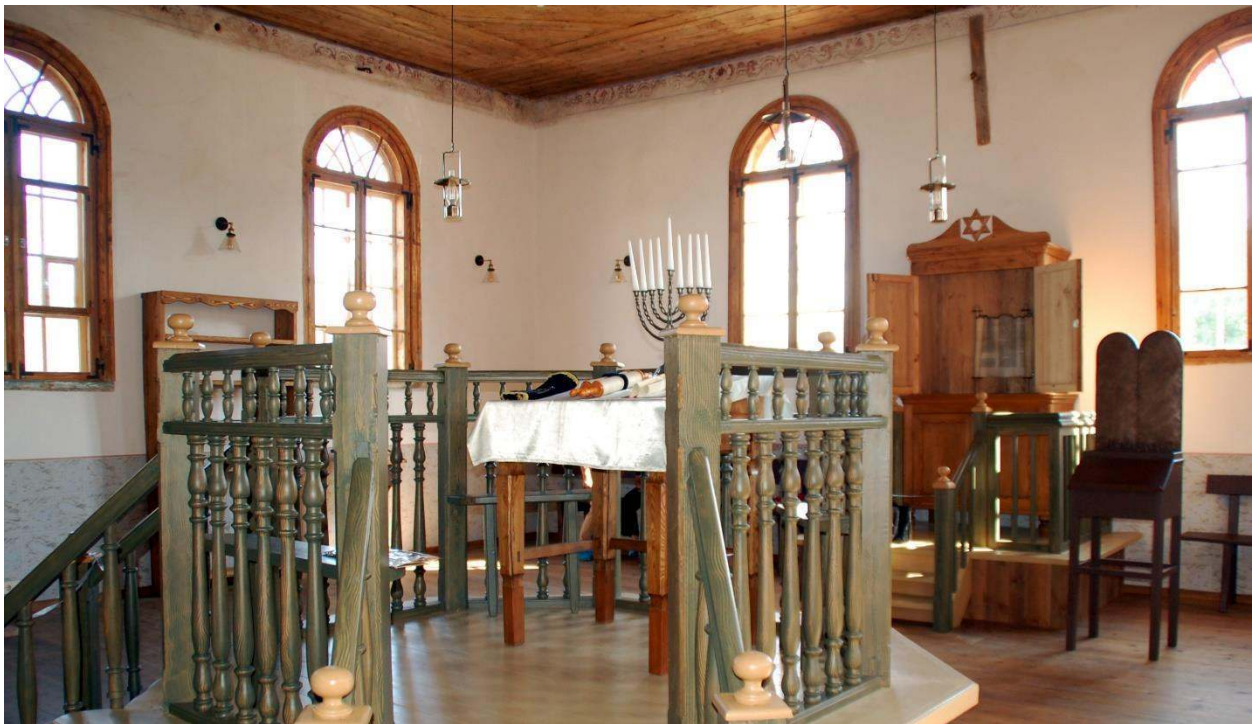


Photo: Praying room

When visitors climb the first floor, they will get inside Jewish shop “Hasya Zorde’s convenience store”. Authors of the exposition are Gunta and Andris Misāns, who made this exposition fitting the synagogue’s style as much as possible, creating authentic atmosphere.



Photo: Exposition “Hasya Zorde’s convenience store” on the first floor

The project "Restoration of Ludza Great Synagogue and Revival of Jews Spiritual Heritage" (ERZLV04/GSKMS/2013/09) was implemented with help of 201,875.00 EUR large financing of the European Economic Area Financial Mechanism provided by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. The Project lasted 2 years: from the 10th of September 2014 to the 9th of September 2016.

The overall objective of the Financial Mechanism of EEA and Norway grants is to contribute to the reduction of economic and social disparities within the EEA and to strengthen bilateral relations between the Donor States and the beneficiary states in Europe. All three states are closely cooperating with the EC based on agreements. EEA and Norway Financial Instrument financing foreseen for 2009 – 2014 amounts to 1.79 milliard EUR. Norway provides about 97% of the total financing. Grants are available for NGOs, research and academic institutions, as well as public and private sectors in 12 newest EU member states, and in Greece, Portugal and Spain.

The cooperation with institutions of the Donor States can vary and it is possible to implement common activities till 2016. Main spheres of support are environment protection, climate change, research and scholarship, health and children, equal rights for men and women, justice and cultural heritage.

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