

## **Jewish Heritage-Educational Tourism: Multiple Origins, Paths and Destinations**

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Volume 5 of *Hagira* follows the symposium held at Oranim Academic College of Education on July 25, 2013, and co-sponsored by the Association for the Social Scientific Study of Jewry (ASSJ). The symposium's title was, "Jewish Educational Tourism: Multiple Origins, Paths and Destinations."

This special Issue of *Hagira* brings together a variety of research papers – some of which were originally presented at the Oranim Symposium – written by academics involved in the study of the broad range of Jewish heritage-educational tourism in various locations, but primarily in Israel. These locations enable the encounter ('mifgash') between young Jews from various origins and cultures in the context of heritage educational tourism, which may impact their Jewish identity and help construct their Jewish peoplehood.

Global tourism has yielded a large variety of tourism forms. One of them, heritage tourism, has often been simply regarded as the visit of tourists to places of historical or cultural importance. Heritage tourism is defined by the background and motives of the tourists and does not inhere in the sites alone. It is not the place of the visit alone, per se, that makes it a heritage site, but in addition, the motivations and perspectives of the visitors who encounter that site (Poria, Butler and Airey 2003). During the past half century, a significant portion of international tourism became a point of contact between nation states and the members of their Diaspora. Thus, tourism has increasingly involved a distinctive set of social and cultural experiences (Lev Ari and Mittelberg 2008). Heritage tourism can serve as a vehicle for constructing national identities and nationalism. A specialized form of educational travel, heritage tourism entails visits to places of historical and cultural significance. Some of these cross-cultural encounters through heritage tourism generate an experiential education (Sasson, Mittelberg, Hect and Saxe 2011).

Prentice (2001), in discussing museum-based heritage tourism, argues that "experiential cultural tourism is about the search for *authentic experience*. It is co-produced between tourism providers and consumers" (Prentice 2001:22). Prentice offers a useful list of ways in which this authenticity is evoked, which include inter alia, direct experience, location, associations with famous people and events, national origins and more. Thus, claims Palmer (1999), heritage tourism plays a role, in many places, in generating and recognizing alternative, authentic modes of collective identification. Ioannides and Ionnides (2006) have described the global patterns of heritage travel of Diaspora Jews, with travel to Israel, the religious homeland being a major destination for what they refer to as 'nostalgic' pilgrimage tourism.

Cohen (2003) also analyzes the factors that motivate students to take part in overseas study programs on educational tours in Israel. Cohen distinguishes between students who come to Israel for religious reasons and those who come for tourism. The first group is more concerned with issues related to Judaism and the Jewish community and less interested in Israel. The second group is more interested in tours, social activities, free time and interacting with Israeli peers and overseas students.

The *Israel visit*, as a form of heritage-educational tourism, has recently moved to a high priority position on the American Jewish communal agenda. Research has demonstrated the Jewish impact of Israel educational trips on participants (see, for example, Cohen 2006, Mittelberg 1999). Chazan (1997) reports that youth visits to Israel have positive outcomes for measures of Jewish identity in adulthood, both when in interaction with other life cycle experiences and also by virtue of their own independent causal weight.

The *Birthright Israel* program (Taglit) was launched in the winter of 2000, marking the start of a massive educational experiment among 5,000 college students from the Diaspora, hailing from Jewish communities in western countries, primarily North America (NA). Later on, during the summer of 2002, the program was expanded to include Former Soviet Union (FSU) Jews (Lev Ari and Mittelberg 2008).

Kelner (2001) offers an insightful discussion on the theoretical issue of authenticity in tourism as well as its application in the *Birthright Israel* program, based on in-depth ethnographic social research. While this comprehensive discussion is beyond the frame of this paper, if authenticity lies not in the objects - the 'objectivist' view - then the alternative may be, as Kelner suggests, "the constructivist position (that) transforms authenticity from a property inherent in toured objects to a set of socially constructed symbolic meanings communicated by the objects." (Kelner, 2001:4).

Participation in educational youth tours to Israel, of which Taglit-Birthright was one, cannot be considered as mere general tourism to Israel; they have their own set of motivations for participation and implications, as they are conducted with the conscious objective of strengthening ties between the Diaspora youth and Israel (Cohen, 2009). In another study, it was found that in the case of travelers from a Diaspora visiting their homeland (from the US and FSU), the heritage tourism inhered not in the site itself, but rather in its differential interpretation. Travel in general, and heritage-educational tourism in particular, indeed play an important role in the reflexive discovery and affirmation of an unfolding authentic Diaspora identity, through engagement with the culture and society of the homeland - in this case, the *Birthright Israel* experience. Thus, in this world, travel and tourism become rites of passage par excellence, where place is transcended by late modern compression of space as well as by the redefinition of its subjective meaning for the participant. In this way, travel and heritage tourism serve to reconstitute the ethnic identity that the traveler brings home and in time,

perhaps, will do the same for the *gloca*/social world in which the traveler lives and moves (Lev Ari and Mittelberg, 2008).

Fishman, Shain, and Saxe (2012-2013) focus on the interactions of American and Israeli youngsters on the tour buses during the Taglit-Birthright travel program in Israel. This program motivates participants "to explore their Jewish identity through a peer educational experience of historic and contemporary Israel" and attempts to strengthen relationships among young Jews in the Diaspora and Israel. Drawing on the analysis of pre- and post-trip surveys, the authors explore the impact of togetherness, emerging during the 10-day trip, on the participants' connections to Judaism and Israel, through the sociological lens of bonding social capital. Their findings show that an atmosphere of community and friendship on the bus is a strong predictor of trip outcomes. Implications for participants' connections with the Jewish community are considered.

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The various articles in this issue are strongly related to the above theoretical and empirical backgrounds and contribute further findings and conclusions regarding the significance of Jewish heritage educational tourism to Israel in strengthening Jewish identity and Jewish peoplehood.

This issue begins with a paper by the late Erik. H Cohen. The issue is dedicated to Erik, who contributed enormously to the study of heritage educational tourism, among other research regarding Jewish peoplehood. The title of Erik's paper is: "Towards a social history of Jewish educational tourism research." His article presents a socio-historic analysis of research on Jewish educational travel. Jewish educational travel has been pioneering in the field of educational-heritage travel, in terms of practice and research. Programs such as group tours to Israel, Jewish summer camps, and pilgrimages to *Shoah* sites were among the first examples of organized educational heritage travel. They are well-established and have been adopted as models for other examples of educational and heritage tourism. In the same vein, since their inception over half a century ago, these programs have been the subject of evaluation and academic study. This article offers a topology of the field, giving a broad perspective on how it has developed over time, in terms of methodologies used, populations covered, questions addressed and scope of surveys conducted.

David Mittelberg raises "Urgent Questions, Pressing Problems, and Emerging Paradigms in Jewish Peoplehood Education." In his article, Mittelberg asks the following questions: What does it mean to educate towards Jewish Peoplehood? How can Jewish educational tourism achieve this goal? His paper traces the historical development of Jewish educational tourism and explores the paradigm of Jewish Peoplehood that emerges from it. This is accomplished through a close analysis of the different stages of programmatic activity at the Department of Jewish Peoplehood–Oren throughout its 25 years. Mittelberg describes three stages of

educational programming at the Department of Jewish Peoplehood–Oren: (1) the Israel experience, which focused on bringing Diaspora Jews to Israel and having Israel impact them; (2) the *mifgash* (facilitated encounter), where Israeli and Diaspora Jews came together to learn from one another; and (3) the building of an ongoing relationship between Jewish communities in the Diaspora and in Israel. These three stages point to an emerging paradigm of Jewish Peoplehood, which includes: belonging to the Jewish people, connecting to other Jews, holding Jewish capital, namely the possession of Jewish cultural knowledge and skills, and taking personal responsibility. This paradigm has the capacity to address the various challenges facing Jewish educational tourism today, pointing the way toward new directions in Jewish educational tourism and educational tourism research.

Roberta Bell-Kligler, in her article, "Moving between Israel and America: Future Jewish leaders doing dialogue, *mifgash* and peoplehood," studied one multi-year linkage program's impact on both Israeli and American university student participants. As a frame to present her findings, the author uses the same four-component peoplehood paradigm mentioned by Mittelberg, consisting of: a sense of belonging to the Jewish People, the feeling of connection to other Jews, Jewish capital, and personal responsibility. The educational program incorporated coordinated academic study with a travel component and a *mifgash* with peers from another country. The paper discusses the similarities as well as the differences not only between the Israeli and the American groups of students, but also between different cohorts of students of the same nationality. Findings indicate that there are compelling reasons to believe that a linkage program brings significant benefits both to actual participants and to others in the Jewish world.

Ariela Keysar raises another relevant question in her article, "Reshaping Jewish Lives? American Jewish College Students and the Trip to Israel." In her article, Keysar focuses on the trips to Israel as a means for Jewish engagement of the millennial generation—those born after 1980. The analyses are based on the Demographic Study of Jewish College Students, 2014, an online survey of four-year institutions of higher education in the U.S. with over 1,100 Jewish students. The main findings indicate that participation in educational tours is not correlated with high religious observance but is correlated with a stronger sense of Jewish peoplehood. This is true of any kind of visit, whether with Taglit, another educational program, or family. Israel visits are a stronger predictor of feelings of Jewish pride and peoplehood than growing up with two Jewish parents.

Eli Shaish and Yuval Dror discuss in their paper, "From the depths of emotion and awareness: Educational program development and non-formal activities of the youth travel to Poland under the Ministry of Education 1988-2008," the way in which the non-formal education system within the Ministry of Education consolidates collective memory for deepening 'Jewish awareness' among the youths who take part in the trips to Poland, by examining the development of the educational program, between 1988 and 2008. In their study, Shaish and Dror used analysis

of learning materials produced by the administration and its associates, the Masua and Moreshet centers and Yad Vashem, among others. The historical-educational study enables learning about the processes of planning and development, ways of assimilating the (non-formal) educational system's policies, and inputs required to this end. Through the preparatory processes in the schools, as well as at the various sites in Poland, emotion initially plays a central role. Over time, the cognitive aspects strengthen and complete it, as the process unfolds into a promise of loyalty and belonging "from the depth of emotion and awareness." The employment of tools of non-formal education amplifies the experiences that take place during the trip to Poland as well as during the preparations in Israel, enriching the learning about the Holocaust.

Judit Bokser Liwerant wrote about "Expanding frontiers and affirming belonging: Youth travel to Israel - A view from Latin America." Bokser-Liwerant's paper analyzes central aspects of the educational trips to Israel based on a complex logic of interdependence, disjuncture and convergences as closely related to the institutional density, the social capital and the communal legacy of the different Jewish communities in the Latino continent. This is particularly important when the related existential and cognitive dimensions associated with the trip's experience are seen as the socializing process in which Israel becomes the territorial and symbolic space where strong and durable collective bonds are expected to develop, while contributing to the circulation of values. For this purpose, the defining characteristics of Jewish life in Latin America are underscored - specifically in Mexico, in a comparative perspective, mainly with Argentina and Brazil. The role that Zionism and Israel have played as identity referents and the foundations for community building is highlighted in order to analyze the differentiated nature and scope of educational trips to Israel. The case at hand, albeit singular in certain respects, exhibits traits that may help us to analyze the character and significance of trips for other Jewish settings and for transnational ethnicities, in a broader sense.

Finally, Sergio DellaPergola, in his article: "Thoughts on core country and Jewish identification: Context, process, output, implications," concludes this issue of *Hagira*. DellaPergola calls for reexamining the broader relationship between Jews and Israel - defined here as the core country of Jewish peoplehood - and their sense of identification with that same Jewish peoplehood. The article reviews some basic concepts in contemporary Jewish identification, through comparisons between the United States and Israel. It focuses on the process and meaning of Jewish identity formation, and on the tools that participate in consolidating and preserving it. The analysis refers to internal and external determinants, intervening variables and different dimensions of the target variable (Jewish identification), as well as its implications. The role of a strengthened relation of individuals with their core country (Israel) and other Jewish identification options available over the course of their life, is discussed here. A general model, illustrative of the creation and maintenance of Jewish identification, defining the role

of, and the expectations from educational tourism within it, is also introduced. A final comment concerns the choice of target population for educational tourism programs in view of the growing complexity in recent years regarding the definition of who is a Jew.

This issue's seven papers are followed by an appendix by Uzi Rebhun and Sergio DellaPergola. The appendix sheds light on the "Population projection of young diaspora Jews (aged 18-26), 2010-2025" and provides estimates for the cohorts that constitute a potential market for the Taglit programs and trips to Israel for the upcoming years.

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