

Online sources for commemoration and remembrance of Jewish life in the Baltic countries and Poland
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The Virtual Shtetl Portal as the Key to the History and Tragic Events of the Jews of Poland

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Virtual Shtetl is an encyclopedic portal by POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. It was established in 2009 within Jewish Historical Association Institute in Warsaw, organization responsible for funding and creating POLIN Museum's core exhibition. Initially the portal served also as a platform inviting local activists and enthusiasts to publish their articles and Jewish heritage documentation. Step by step the Virtual Shtetl changed its appearance and became a professional website, publishing articles prepared by Jewish studies specialists and academic researchers. For many years the website had over 1 million visitors per year (vast majority, 75-80%, are Polish language users).

In the last 10 years the Virtual Shtetl has gone through many verifications and it is a subject of everyday self-reflection on our work and Jewish history:

- there were almost 2000 Jewish settlements marked on its map (within historic borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth); now we have 1400, including Jewish communities from the time of the Second Republic of Poland, Prussia and part of the called Pale of Settlement (previous Russian Empire territories 1791-1915, in Polish historiography called "Dalekie Kresy"/"Eastern Borderlands");
- developments of the biographies, including Jewish women; this part of the website is a unlimited source for online commemoration practices, especially on social media;
- Jewish heritage documentation *in situ*, so the portal will present an updated and attractive illustrations; since 2016 our team had visited hundreds of Jewish heritage sites in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine and Kaliningrad Oblast (East Prussia in XVIII-XIX century called "Królewiec" (Königsberg) in Polish).
- verification of archival photos collected within a project "Polish Roots in Israel": thousands of photos from the interwar period pursued by the Jewish Historical Institute Association in 2005-2009 which became substantial for the website's archival sources.

Now, we are planning a major technological upgrade of the portal. As the concept of "shtetl" becomes a subject of an academic critical discussion we also consider rebranding.

Important remarks for a discussion:

- a good commemoration = a reliable historical information;
- cybersecurity policy and prevention (just take a look at Europeana 2025 Policy Forum Call to Action - 'Ready for the future: Building preparedness in digital cultural heritage' prepared on the basis of [Preparedness - European Commission](#); Jewish heritage is particularly vulnerable in this context;
- Regular audience development research;
- AI usage (helpful and not helpful at the same time); especially during misinformation and hybrid wars;