"Mapping Holocaust-related Sites in Lithuania and Creating a Database of Holocaust Victims"

1. Introduction

Dear colleagues,

I am pleased to have the opportunity to present a project that is significant not only for Lithuania but for Holocaust remembrance across Europe. The title of my presentation is "Mapping Holocaust-related Sites in Lithuania and Creating a Database of Holocaust Victims." I will speak about the Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania. What this project is, how it emerged, who it is aimed at, what possibilities it offers, what advantages and challenges we see, and finally, what conclusions we can draw?

2. Project Origins

Before the creation of the Holocaust Atlas, information about Holocaust sites in Lithuania was fragmented and difficult to access. Until 2011, there had been no publication combining both information about the mass extermination of Jews and the geographical locations of those mass killing places. There were, however, several important antecedents: the two-volume "Mass Murder in Lithuania, 1941–1944: A Collection of Documents", published in Vilnius in 1963 and 1973, and "The Book of Sorrow", compiled by Vilna Gaon Jewish History Museum's employee Josif Levinson and published in 1997, which contained photographs from around 190 mass killing sites and a list of Lithuanian cities and towns where Jews lived, alongside information about where they were murdered. These works laid an important foundation, but they did not bring together all the evidence in a single, comprehensive form.

It was in this context that, in 2010, the Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania was launched by the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, in cooperation with Austrian volunteers from *Gedenkdienst* organization. The main goal was to create a publicly accessible interactive map documenting all known mass killing sites in Lithuania. The preparation of the Atlas was supported financially by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and the Office of the Prime Minister of Lithuania.

By combining historical research, archival sources, eyewitness testimonies, and geographic information, the Holocaust Atlas became the first digital platform to unify this data and make it accessible to the wider public.

3. Content and Scope

Today the Atlas documents more than 227 Holocaust sites across Lithuania showing the scale and geographic spread of the mass exterminations of Jews. For each site, the Atlas provides a comprehensive profile, including: the exact geographic location on the map, the date of the event, the number of victims, where it is known, a short historical description of what happened, information about the perpetrators, details of memorials or monuments erected at the site, as well as photographs and references for further study. This means the Atlas is much more than a simple map. It is a research database that brings together geography, history, and memory. The

combination of spatial data and historical context allows both scholars and the public to understand the Holocaust not only as a set of events, but also as a landscape that still shapes Lithuania today.

4. Target Audience

The Holocaust Atlas was created with several audiences in mind:

First, it is a resource for researchers and historians providing a reliable, structured database that can be used for further academic study. Second, it is designed for teachers and students. The Atlas serves as an accessible educational tool, useful for classroom learning, school projects, and especially for the excursions to historical sites. Third, it supports heritage specialists responsible for identifying, preserving, and maintaining Holocaust memorial sites across Lithuania. And finally, it is open to the wider public and descendants of victims. For them, the Atlas is a space of memory and commemoration, restoring dignity to places and names. Importantly, the Atlas is available both in Lithuanian and English, ensuring accessibility not only within Lithuania but also to the international community.

5. Features of the Atlas

One of the most important features of the Holocaust Atlas is its interactive map. Users can search for sites by town, district, or keyword, which makes navigation intuitive and accessible. Each site comes with a detailed profile. This includes not only the historical facts about the killings, but also its official status and information on how the site has been memorialized over time. The Atlas also provides photographs, giving users a sense of how these places look today. This visual element is crucial for connecting history with the present landscape.

Another key element is the inclusion of precise GPS coordinates. Many of these sites were (and some it is still) difficult to find because they are often located deep in forests, are not marked on regular maps, and sometimes even unknown to local residents. For this reason, every site was visited, its GPS coordinates recorded, and a short description prepared on how to reach it. This makes the Atlas a practical tool not only for researchers but also for visitors who wish to pay their respects. One more feature of the Atlas is that the users are directed to a wide range of additional sources (archives, testimonies, photo collections, and name databases) hosted by institutions such as the Vilna Gaon Jewish History Museum, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem, the USC Shoah Foundation Institute, the Mémorial de la Shoah, the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum, the Fortunoff Video Archive at Yale, and the Maceva Jewish Cemetery Catalogue. This is how we wanted the Atlas to be not just a tool for locating sites, but a comprehensive digital platform that combines history, geography, memory, and international collaboration.

6. Holocaust Sites as National Heritage

It is important to mention that all Holocaust sites in Lithuania are declared monuments of national significance. They are included in the Register of Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Lithuania as cultural heritage objects that must be maintained and preserved. Their protection and supervision are ensured by the Cultural Heritage Department under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania, with staff working in 7 regional branches responsible for inspections. This means that Holocaust sites in Lithuania are not only markers of historical memory but also officially recognized national heritage. The state thus takes responsibility for their preservation, maintenance, and respectful commemoration.

7. Related Databases

When speaking about the Holocaust Atlas, we must emphasize that it is not the only tool developed by the Vilna Gaon Jewish History Museum. From the Atlas website, users can also access another database: "Holocaust Victims' Names" (http://www.holocaustnames.lt/).

This database contains individual records of victims: names, surnames, places of birth, life stories, and references to the archival sources and in some cases even photographs. This gives the crime committed a human dimension because it talks not only about places, but also lives of real people.

In addition to individual entries, the database also provides information about Jewish organizations that operated in Lithuania before and during the Holocaust.

Thus, while the Atlas allows us to see the places, the "Holocaust Victims' Names" database helps us remember the people and communities. Together, they complement one another and create a fuller landscape of memory.

8. Advantages of the Project

First of all, the Atlas stands out because of its accessibility. All the information is publicly available online, free of charge, and without any special permissions. This openness ensures that anyone whether a scholar, student, or member of the public can use it. The Atlas has a strong visual impact. By placing events on a map, it allows us to see the geographic spread of the killings. The spatial dimension makes the scale of the Holocaust clearer than words or numbers alone. It also has great educational value because it can be used as a learning tool and even in visits to the sites themselves. The Atlas plays a vital role in the preservation of memory. These sites are not just points on a map. They are living witnesses of history. By documenting them, the Atlas ensures that they are not forgotten, and that remembrance is tied to real, physical places.

9. Challenges and Limitations

One of the main challenges is incomplete data. In some cases, we do not know the exact number of victims, only approximate figures or we do not have enough archive data to reconstruct the exact mass extermination. This reflects both the destruction of records during the war and the silencing of testimony afterwards.

Another challenge involves technological issues. Like any digital project, the Atlas requires constant updating and modernization. To remain user-friendly and reliable, it must keep pace with evolving digital standards and expectations.

We also face significant ethical dilemmas. How should we present information about perpetrators? How do we protect the dignity of the victims when we publish sensitive data? And how can we ensure that all sites are treated with respect, both in the digital space and in the physical landscape? These challenges remind us that the Atlas is not a finished product but an ongoing process, requiring continuous research, care, and responsibility.

10. Conclusions and Future Directions

To conclude, the Holocaust Atlas of Lithuania is, above all, a unique tool that brings together geography, history and memory as well as grassroots initiatives and specialists. It shows us not only what happened, but also where it happened, anchoring memory in the landscape. It has become an important part of memory culture in Lithuania, ensuring that the sites of mass killings are not forgotten and are integrated into public remembrance. It also provides a solid foundation for research and education. Historians, teachers, students, heritage specialists alike can rely on it as a trustworthy resource.

Looking ahead, we see several important directions for the future:
1. Closer integration with international projects, so that Lithuania's Holocaust history is visible in a broader European and global context.
2. Expansion with more data on victims' names, connecting places to the individuals who perished there.
3. Closer cooperation with the local municipalities, communities, schools, and young people, to make sure the Atlas is not just a static historical record, but a living educational platform that continues to shape awareness and remembrance.

In this way, the Atlas will not only preserve the past but also actively contribute to how future generations understand and engage with Holocaust memory.

11. Closing

In conclusion, I want to stress that the Holocaust Atlas is not only a historical project. It is a tool of remembrance and respect for the victims, embodying the principle of "Never Again." I invite all colleagues to use this resource, to contribute to its growth, and to ensure that the memory of Holocaust victims in Lithuania remains alive.

Thank you for your attention!