

WALDEMAR CUDNY

UNIVERSITY OF LODZ

THE RADEGAST STATION HOLOCAUST MONUMENT - ITS HISTORY, CONTEMPORARY FUNCTION AND PERCEPTION IN THE EYES OF TOURISTS AND LODZ INHABITANTS

ABSTRACT: The article presents the problems of the Lodz Ghetto organized by the Germans during World War II and the role of the ghetto railway station – called Radegast Station. The author also describes the contemporary function of the station, paying particular attention to the initiative of the local authorities, which led to building a monument within its premises, commemorating the Holocaust of the Lodz Jewish population. Following that, the author presents the results of a survey conducted in the monument area in 2007, which allowed the local authorities' activity and its indirect influence on the image of Lodz to be assessed.

KEY WORDS: Lodz, Ghetto, the Holocaust, perception, tourism.

Lodz (Łódź in Polish) became a big city in the 19th c. as a result of rapid industrialization processes. Due to the decisions taken by the Polish Kingdom authorities concerning the localization of a new industrial city in that area, Lodz developed from a small farming settlement into a large industrial centre, based on textile production. In the 19th c. the city became a “promised land” to entrepreneurs from the Russian Empire and Western Europe. Settlers from the Polish Kingdom, Russia, Saxony, and the Czechs together with the Brits went there to stay. The ethnic composition of the city included mostly Poles, Jews, Germans, and Russians. The Jews, next to Germans, were the owners of the largest industrial fortunes. In 1939, 33% of the 680,000 inhabitants were Jews (Koter, Kulesza, Puś, Pytlas, 2005). The demographic-social structure of Lodz

changed completely as a result of World War II. The greatest losses were suffered by the Lodz Jews, who were cruelly exterminated by the Germans.

In 1940 German occupants started to build the Lodz Ghetto, which covered area of only 4.13 km². It was inhabited by over 153,000 Jews. Later, the number of Ghetto prisoners increased because 6,471 Jews were deported there from other parts of Poland, and 19,722 from west European countries. The Lodz Ghetto was also the place of detention and extermination of 5,000 Gypsies and Sinti people, deported from the Austrian-Hungarian borderland (Baranowski, 1999). The Ghetto was an efficiently working labour camp, but first of all a gigantic death machine, where people died of hunger and exhaustion, and from where they were transported to death camps. In 1944, when the east front line was approaching, the Germans decided to close down the Lodz Ghetto. In the summer the Jews were sent to death camps. Transports departed from the Radegast Station (Łódź Radogoszcz), which served the Ghetto from the beginning of its existence to the end.

The Radegast Station was situated on the edge of the Ghetto. It was a trans-shipment point, where provisions arrived and from where things produced in the Ghetto were exported. However, it became a symbol of the extermination of Lodz Jews due to their inhumane deportation to death camps in summer 1944.

After World War II Lodz became a practically mono-national city, with predominantly Polish population, which resulted from the extermination of Lodz Jews, their post-war emigration, as well as the flight of most of the German population escaping from the approaching Red Army. The history and extermination of Lodz Jews was forgotten for many years after the war, and only in 1989 did the city authorities start to work on means of restoring the memory of the multinational heritage of Lodz. The year 1989 was the beginning of a political and economic change in Poland, described as a system transformation. One of the elements of the system transformation in Poland was the change of the attitude of the society and central and local authorities to the cultural heritage of the country. It started to be treated as a value in itself and a number of steps were taken to protect it. The changes also regarded Lodz, which so far had been perceived as a not very attractive industrial centre. The history of Lodz, also that from before World War II, and the history and the extermination of Lodz Jews in particular were not well known. After 1989 the city authorities started activities to remind of and preserve the pre-war cultural heritage. It was to change the negative image of Lodz and to develop its cultural and entertainment function. It was especially important if we consider the search for new development opportunities after the fall of textile industry in the region. As part of this plan steps were taken to commemorate and popularize the knowledge about the history of Lodz Jews. Close contacts with different Jewish institutions in Poland and abroad were established and a number of cultural events connected with the history of Lodz

Jews were organized. New sites appeared which commemorated the Jews, such as the Decalogue Monument located in the centre of Lodz, the Park of the Survivors, and the Radegast Station Holocaust Monument located at the edge of the former Lodz Ghetto (Fig. 1).

One of the main steps taken by the city council was building the Holocaust Monument on the premises of the former Radegast Station, commemorating the Jewish Holocaust in the Lodz Ghetto. The work on the monument, designed by Czesław Bielecki, began in 2003 and was completed two years later. The monument consists of the following elements: the original wooden station

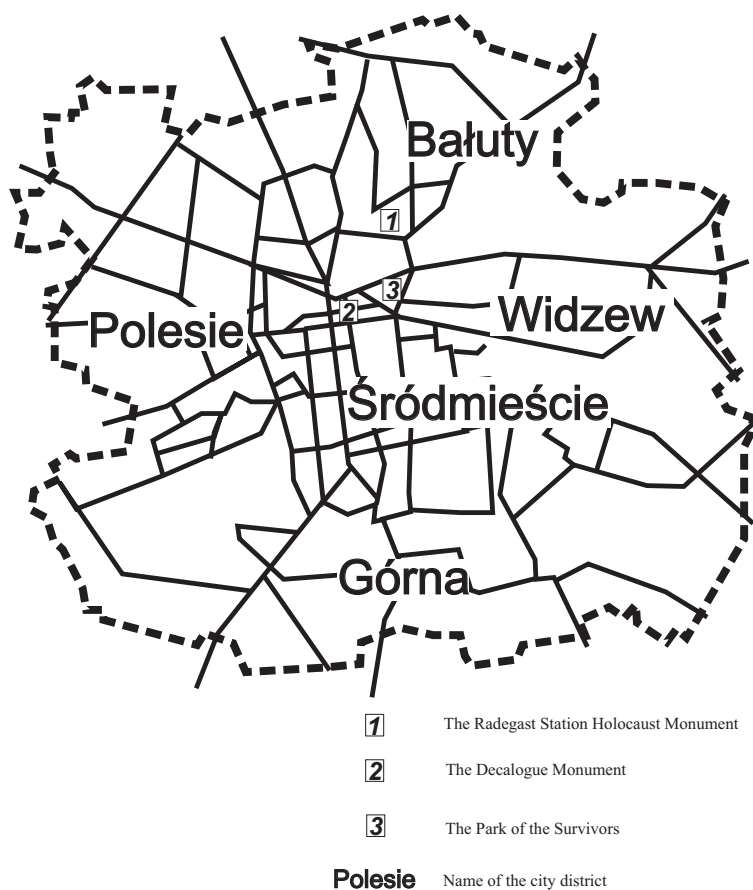


Fig. 1. Location of the Radegast Station Holocaust Monument at the map of Lodz

Source: Author's compilation based on information obtained from the city council

building, large concrete matzevahs behind it, with engraved names of the death camps where the Jews were deported, and the concrete Tunnel of the Deported, finishing with the Hall of Cities. A tall Column of Memory towers above. The Tunnel symbolizes the journey from the railway station to concentration camps. The Hall of Cities is a space for thought and prayer with the names of the cities from which the Jews were brought to the Ghetto engraved on the walls. The huge broken Column of Memory symbolizes a crematorium chimney and refers to the popular Jewish symbol of sudden death (Bielecki, 2005). The Lodz authorities put a lot of effort into the building of the Radegast Station Holocaust Monument, as regards both the organization and the money. Out of five million zlotys spent on the Monument, half was provided from the city budget. The Monument has become an important element of the urban space of Lodz; it is visited by over 36,000 people annually – city inhabitants and tourists.

Data analysis shows that the Radegast Station is visited most frequently at the end of summer and at the beginning of autumn (Fig. 2). The culmination of visits in August is caused by the anniversary of the closure of the Lodz Ghetto, commemorated at that time. The tradition of commemorating this anniversary was started by the President of Lodz, Jerzy Kropiwnicki, in 2004. The main ceremonies take place on the premises of the Radegast Station Monument and attract many guests, also from abroad. The growing number of visits in September and October results from the numerous school excursions, typically organized in these months.

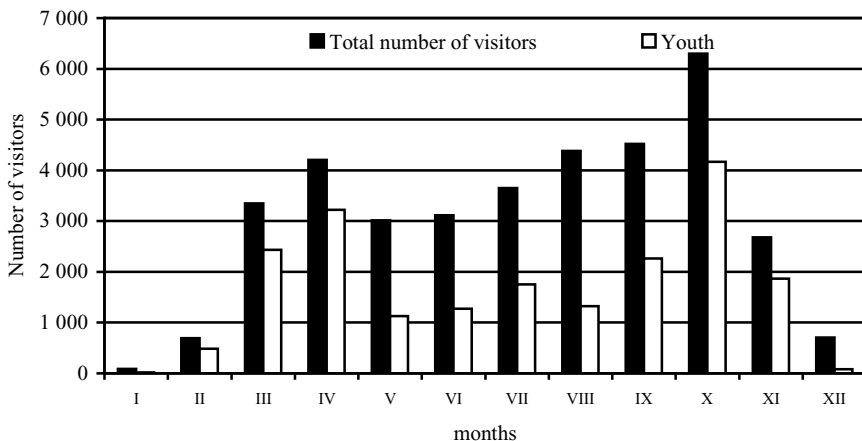


Fig. 2. The number and structure of visitors to the Radegast Station Holocaust Monument in individual months 2006

Source: Information obtained from the Radegast Station Monument employees

In order to evaluate the Radegast Station Monument and its influence on the image of the city, 450 questionnaires were distributed among the visitors on the premises in 2007. The survey was standardized and voluntary, the respondents were people randomly chosen from those visiting the site. They included both the city inhabitants and tourists. The questionnaires contained questions regarding the form of visiting the Monument, the respondents' addresses, the length of stay in Lodz (a question for the tourists), as well as the sources of information about the Monument. The last question regarded the respondents' opinion about the Monument.

A great majority of the 450 respondents (70.6%) were individual visitors. Only 29.4% were visiting with a group, usually a school or tourist excursion. As regards the visitors' dwelling places, 46.6% were the inhabitants of Lodz and 53.4% came from outside the city. In order to define precisely the foreign visitors' places of origin, a question was asked about the country they had arrived from. Poles made up 62.1% of the respondents (Table 1), and were followed by tourists

Table 1. Structure of answers to the question regarding the respondents' country of origin

Country of origin	No of answers	Percentage
Poland	279	62.1
Israel	56	12.5
The United States	22	4.9
Great Britain	17	3.8
France	13	2.9
Germany	9	2.0
Denmark	8	1.8
Sweden	8	1.8
Australia	5	1.1
Canada	5	1.1
Lack of answer	4	0.9
The Netherlands	4	0.9
Italy	4	0.9
Russia	3	0.7
Belgium	2	0.4
Brazil	2	0.4
Spain	2	0.4
Ireland	2	0.4
Switzerland	2	0.4
Argentina	1	0.2
Macedonia	1	0.2
Slovakia	1	0.2
Total	450	100.0

Source: Author's compilation based on survey.

from Israel (over 12%), the USA, Great Britain, France, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Australia, and Canada. Other nationalities were represented by much smaller numbers.

The next question in the questionnaire was directed only to the visitors from outside Lodz. They were asked how many times they had been to Lodz. The majority (57%) claimed that it had been their first visit to Lodz; 43% had visited the city before. The next question regarded the number of days the visitors from outside the city had spent there. Most of them (56%) were staying for 1–3 days (Table 2), 17% for 4–7 days and 26% for over 7 days. It is clearly visible that the majority of tourists visiting the Radegast Station stay in Lodz for up to three days. It is not an economically favourable tendency, as longer tourist stays bring more income to the city. Besides, a longer stay enables the tourist to learn more about the place and its assets. Short stays can be explained by the fact that foreign visitors to the Radegast Station usually come from Israel and their stays in Lodz are part of organized trips to sites connected with Polish Jews' culture and history. They visit places like Warsaw, Góra Kalwaria, and Nazi Death Camps, e.g. Auschwitz. Recently the itineraries have included Lodz, where tourists visit the Jewish Cemetery at Bracka Street and the Radegast Station Holocaust Monument. Full visiting programmes, comprising many destinations situated far from one another, are the reason why the stays are short. What is more, many foreign tourists visit Lodz only on a day trip, staying in other cities, e.g. Warsaw or Krakow. Information regarding the length of foreign tourists' stays in Lodz is confirmed by the data provided by the Institute of Tourism. It shows that the average length of tourist stays in Lodz in 2005 was four nights. Nearly half of the stays lasted 2–4 days (Radkowska, 2006).

Table 2. Structure of answers to the question regarding the visitors' length of stay in Lodz

No of days spent in Lodz	No of answers	Percentage
1	73	30.4
2 – 3	63	26.3
4 – 5	29	12.1
6 – 7	12	5.0
over 7	63	26.2
total	240	100.0

Source: Author's compilation based on survey

One of the aims of the questionnaire was to find out where the respondents visiting the Radegast Station had learnt about the Monument. It turns out that the

most frequently quoted source is the media – Television, Press, and the Internet (23% of cases) (Table 3). Other sources of information were friends and family, followed by tourist guides and schools. It is understandable, because some of the visitors to the Monument are pupils brought there by teachers, and many foreign groups go there persuaded by their tourist guides. Some respondents learnt about the Monument by chance or from publications such as guide-books or historical books. Regrettably, not many people (only 1.3%) (Table 3) learnt about the Radegast Station at a tourist information point, which proves the inefficiency of this system. 15% of the respondents did not point to any source of information about the Radegast Station. The structure of answers obtained from visitors living in Lodz and from those coming from outside the city is different. Lodz inhabitants learn about the Monument mainly from the media, and next from the family and friends. In the case of tourists, the knowledge comes first of all from friends and tourist guides, followed by the family. The media play a much smaller role here than in the case of the city inhabitants. It is understandable, considering that the events related to the building and functioning of the Monument were commented on mainly in the local media, and it is mainly the city inhabitants that have access to them.

Table 3. Structure of answers to the question regarding the source of information about the Radegast Station Holocaust Monument

Source of information	No of answers	Percentage
media	107	23.9
friends	75	16.7
lack of answer	68	15.1
family	46	10.2
tourist guide (person)	37	8.2
school	33	7.3
chance	25	5.6
guide-book	20	4.4
books	12	2.7
personal observations	9	2.0
tourist information	6	1.3
the Monument designer, Czesław Bielecki	5	1.1
personal war experience	5	1.1
museum in Radegast	1	0.2
Jewish cemetery	1	0.2
total	450	100.0

Source: Author's compilation based on survey

The final but one of the most important questions in the questionnaire was the one in which the respondents were asked for an opinion regarding the Monument. About 39% answered that question. In 40% of the cases the comments were made by tourists, and in 37% by the city inhabitants. It can be seen that positive opinions clearly prevail (80%). Negative comments make up 12% of the total number of answers, and the remaining 8% are hard to classify. Positive comments came from the tourists slightly more often than from Lodz inhabitants. If we look at the comments in detail (Table 4), we see that the majority of respondents described the Monument as “very good”, “astonishing” (in the positive sense) and “extremely impressive”. Comments, like “good”, “interesting”, “very good” or

Table 4. Structure of comments regarding the Radegast Station Holocaust Monument

Comment	No of answers	percentage
Very good	37	21.2
Astonishing	31	17.7
Very impressive	20	11.4
Good	12	6.9
Interesting	12	6.9
Insufficient exhibition	9	5.1
I have come with my family	6	3.4
Very interesting	5	2.9
Unusual	5	2.9
Mustn't be forgotten	5	2.9
Insufficient exposition	5	2.9
Badly constructed	4	2.3
Very important	3	1.7
Curious	3	1.7
Worth visiting	3	1.7
Important	3	1.7
Painful	2	1.1
Needed	2	1.1
I lived in the Lodz Ghetto	2	1.1
Depressing	2	1.1
Thanks to the city authorities	2	1.1
Hasn't changed for years	1	0.6
Unnecessary	1	0.6
Total	175	100.0

Source: Author's compilation based on survey

“unusual”, were less frequent. Most of the negative comments included remarks regarding insufficient information about the Holocaust and the Lodz Ghetto, as well as the sparse exhibition on the premises of the Station.

It must be stressed that one of the effects of the socio-economic transformation, which started in Poland in 1989, was a change in the authorities’ attitude to the problems of the historical and cultural heritage of the country. In recent years, authorities at different levels, including the local authorities of Lodz, have been taking steps to save important historical events from being forgotten. In Lodz it was part of a large-scale strategy to preserve the history and cultural heritage of the city. Reviving the memory of Lodz Jews was an element of this strategy. On the initiative of the Lodz authorities, there appeared many sites in the city area devoted to the memory of the Jewish population. Currently, the most important of them is the Radegast Station Holocaust Monument. It is a significant element of the urban space, frequently visited by the city inhabitants and tourists arriving in Lodz.

The Lodz authorities’ activity changed the inhabitants’ and tourists’ perception of the city. The communist period was full of distortions and concealments as regards the history of Lodz Jews, their role in the development of the city and their extermination during World War II. Disregarding these problems resulted in creating many negative stereotypes, which often affected the Polish-Jewish relationship. Due to places such as the Radegast Station Holocaust Monument, the truth reaches a vast group of people, both in Lodz and abroad, and it is possible to change the image of the city and fight negative stereotypes. Owing to the Monument, Lodz inhabitants and tourists from other regions of Poland and abroad notice the change in the approach to the painful history of the city. It is observable in the positive comments about the Monument, which say that it is “good”, “interesting” and “needed”. Negative opinions are in the minority and concern the insufficient amount of information. The Monument is particularly important for improving the image of Poland among the Jewish population, as the image of Poland, Poles and Lodz has not been the best so far. Presently Lodz is best perceived by Israeli tourists, which shows in the large number of visitors from this country arriving at the Radegast Station.

REFERENCES

- Koter, M. Kulesza, M. Puś, W. Pytlas, S.** 2005: Wpływ wielonarodowego dziedzictwa kulturowego Łodzi na współczesne oblicze miasta, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, p. 300.

- Baranowski, J.** 1999: Łódzkie getto 1940–1944. *Vademecum*, Łódź: Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi&Bilbo, p. 128.
- Baranowski, J.** 2004: Liquidation of the Jews Łódź Ghetto in the Chełmno on Ner Extermination Camp. In: *The extermination center for Jews in Chełmno on Ner in the light of the latest research. Symposium proceedings. September 6–7 2004*, Łódź: The Council for the Protection of Memory of Combat and Martyrdom in Warsaw, The Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem, The District Museum in Konin, p. 4–9.
- Bielecki, C.** 2005: Więcej niż architektura. Pochwała eklektyzmu, Olszanica: Wydawnictwo BOSZ, p. 216.
- Radkowska, B.** 2006: *Turystyka polska w 2005 roku. Wielkie miasta*. Warszawa: Instytut Turystyki, p. 41.

CORRESPONDENCE TO:

Waldemar Cudny
University of Lodz, Branch in Tomaszow Mazowiecki
Institute of Tourism
Konstytucji 3 Maja 65/ 67, 97-200 Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Poland
[e-mail: algeron1@neostrada.pl]