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## SYNAGOGUES IN THE AGE OF UKRAINE'S INDEPENDENCE

### THE REDISCOVERY AND RENOVATION OF THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

#### Abstract

The Jewish revival in independent Ukraine in the early 1990s was accompanied by the discovery, restitution and restoration of historic synagogue buildings after long decades of neglect. With the advent of Soviet power, the policy of atheism and the nationalization of religious property, this architectural heritage had been forcibly detached from Jewish culture and memory throughout the twentieth century. World War II, the Holocaust and the ban on national life almost completely erased this architectural layer, destroying and depersonalizing it in urban development and collective memory. The process of renovating old synagogue buildings, beginning in the post-Soviet era, was basically completed by the communities in the late 1990s and early 2010s. As a result, a whole layer of architectural heritage has been revived in Ukraine, where there are more than 100 synagogues all over the country.

Due to the sharp decline in the country's Jewish population, communities needed to return between one and three historical synagogue buildings in each city, mainly choral ones, built in the leading European and regional styles of the turn of the twentieth century. It was these buildings that began to act as visible symbols of Jewish presence, emphasizing the regional uniqueness of the historical heritage of the Jews from different countries, formed within other cultural and political contexts. Another group – fortified synagogues from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries located in former *shtetls* left without Jews – has been cut off both from the current centers of Jewish life and from state restoration and renovation programs and is doomed to gradual destruction. The Ukrainian experience shows that the synagogue buildings that are in demand in Jewish life and those that are abandoned have yet to be rediscov-