In order to enable the Research Unit to be financially independent of state subsidies in the future, a Society of Friends of the Bet Tfila – Research Unit for Jewish Architecture in Europe, was established in 2003 to support these endeavours. One objective of the Society is to establish a non-profit foundation, the fruits of which will be used exclusively to support the work of the Research Unit.

It is expected that after an initial phase of four to six years, the Research Unit will be fully operational.
Objectives

The purpose of the Bet Tfila — Research Unit for Jewish Architecture in Europe is to document and research the sacred and secular architecture of Jewish communities in Europe with reference to its development within the cultural, historical and typological context. The Research Unit acts as an interdisciplinary German-Israeli entity, disseminating the results in scholarly and popular publications in order to raise the awareness of the general public for the need to preserve the endangered visual culture of the Jewish people. Through this effort, a young generation of scholars will be introduced to this subject, in an effort to integrate it into the curriculum of European universities.

Endangered Jewish buildings and their imminent loss — especially in Europe, but also in North Africa, the Middle East and beyond — make the systematic research of Jewish visual culture an urgent task. Previous research in Germany indicates that even nowadays, former Jewish ritual buildings, which have lost their original function, are still being disfigured by alterations and demolished.

To save the Jewish visual heritage from oblivion and destruction, the Center for Jewish Art at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Department of Architectural History at the Technical University of Braunschweig (Brunswick) have documented and researched the architecture of extant former synagogues, ritual baths and cemetery chapels in Germany, and studied the archival material of buildings destroyed since 1938, thus making them accessible for critical comparative research.

In order to provide a permanent basis for the ongoing documentation and research of Jewish architecture in Europe, the Center for Jewish Art and the Department of Architectural History are establishing a joint research body entitled: Bet Tfila – Research Unit for Jewish Architecture in Europe.

Concurrent with the research of ritual buildings and Jewish community facilities, the Research Unit may also study the history and typology of the Temple, the Church and the Mosque, which are expressed in its Hebrew name, Bet Tfila — a house of prayer.
**Activity**

The main activities of the *Bet Tfila – Research Unit for Jewish Architecture in Europe* are as follows:

- Organisation and scholarly supervision of research projects, for which funds are to be raised through research-promoting institutions.
- Expanding the inventory of Jewish ritual buildings in Europe, which includes documentary recordings of construction, current and historical photos, descriptions and archival material. This will be added to the growing inventory of buildings already documented by the Center for Jewish Art.
- Integrating the documentations into the section of Architecture of Jewish Monuments and Sites of the *Jerusalem Index of Jewish Art*.
- Scientific publications.
- Disseminating the documentation and research results to a broad general public through lectures, conferences and exhibitions.
- Training and promoting a young generation of scholars through scholarships, organising interdisciplinary and international study groups and joint courses, exchanging students and lecturers and supporting doctoral candidates.

Through its international and interdisciplinary approach, the Research Unit will set impulses promoting research into Jewish architecture as a part of the world shaped by the monotheistic religions. In reflecting upon these themes, similarities as well as differences between cultures and ages will be clarified. These critical comparisons will thus lead to clear conclusions and a greater mutual understanding.
Organisation

The Research Unit is located in Jerusalem, Israel and in Braunschweig, Germany each with its own study group. It pursues the above mentioned objectives and activities in close co-operation and by continuous exchange of researchers and knowledge. The Technical University of Braunschweig and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, which have signed a co-operative agreement in 2000, will support the Research Unit by providing experienced researchers, premises and infrastructure.

In 2002, a preliminary study was conducted in order to outline the specific objectives and activities and to clarify the structure, contractual basis and financing of the Bet Tfila — Research Unit. This study was carried out at the request of Ms. Edelgard Bulmahn, the German Federal Minister for Education and Research.