



Yiddish in Public Space: The Art of Language

The visual expressions of Jewish presence in European urban spaces are ambiguous. On the one hand, Jewish religious buildings lacked the belltowers, domes, or minarets visible from afar; Jews did not erect crosses along roads or place figures of saints on the facades of urban houses. On the other hand, Jewish presence in cityscapes was quite prominent: large synagogues towered over the low buildings of Jewish quarters, and Jews were easily recognizable by their distinctive clothing. By the late 19th century, eruv was installed in many Eastern European towns, and each autumn, sukkot were erected in streets and courtyards. Hebrew inscriptions also featured prominently in the streets, prescribing behavior, advertising goods, or proclaiming values.

With the advent of modernity and Jewish migrations across Europe and overseas, Jewish inscriptions gained new significance. They marked Jewish shops amid rows of general ones, appeared on synagogue facades as signs of identity, advertised theatrical and cinematic events, and even designated state institutions and streets, embedding Jewish presence more visibly in urban landscapes.

In this symposium, we plan to focus on the public presence of one Jewish language: Yiddish. Our goal is to explore the visibility of Yiddish in public spaces across Eastern and Western Europe and in the territories of Yiddish-speaking diasporas.

We will examine its role in signage, memorials, storefronts, and other contexts as a marker of cultural identity, memory, and community. Through interdisciplinary discussions, we aim to uncover how Yiddish has both shaped and been shaped by the public sphere, connecting past and present narratives around the globe.

The proposed working languages of the symposium are Yiddish, Hebrew, and English. Please send abstracts of your papers (up to 300 words) along with a short CV by February 10, 2025, to Yiddish.Center@biu.ac.il

Organizing committee:
Prof. Ber Kotlerman, Bar Ilan
Dr. Vladimir Levin,
The Hebrew University

די קונסט פֿון ייִדיש

