



Research Report: the New Jewish Cemetery in Lublin

1. Introduction

The Nowy Cmentarz Żydowski (New Jewish Cemetery) in Lublin represents one of the most complex and underinterpreted heritage sites in Lublin. Established in the early 19th century, it functioned as a central burial ground for the Jewish community, only to be radically transformed by the violence of the Second World War and the spatial reconfigurations of the postwar period. Today, the cemetery exists not as a clearly legible necropolis, but as a fragmented and partially obscured landscape, where traces of burial coexist with everyday urban use.

Recent research increasingly frames the site not simply as a cemetery, but as a **palimpsest of memory**: a space in which successive historical layers remain present yet difficult to read.

2. Historical Transformation and Spatial Disruption

The cemetery, founded in 1828, expanded over time and remained in use even during the German occupation. During this period, it likely served not only as a burial ground but also as a site of executions and the interment of victims from the Lublin ghetto and prison system.

After the war, however, the integrity of the cemetery was irreversibly disrupted. A key moment in this transformation was the division of the original cemetery area by modern infrastructure, including a major artery, which split the historical necropolis into separate zones. One part remained an active burial site, while another gradually assumed the character of a **public green space**, detached from its original meaning.

As a result, the present-day landscape no longer reflects the historical boundaries of the cemetery. Instead, it produces a condition in which burial grounds, including potentially unmarked graves, exist within spaces now used for everyday recreation.

3. Research Approaches and Emerging Perspectives

Contemporary studies of the site draw on a combination of historical analysis, spatial observation, and community-based research. Rather than attempting to reconstruct the cemetery solely through archival means, researchers increasingly emphasize the need to understand how the site is experienced today—by residents, visitors, and users who may be unaware of its funerary character.

Particular attention is given to the **absence of visible markers**. Unlike preserved cemeteries, where gravestones define spatial structure, here the majority of burial sites are no longer legible.

This absence has led to a profound disjunction between the material reality of the site and its social perception.

The cemetery thus functions simultaneously as a **space of burial**, including areas associated with wartime violence, and a **neutralized urban landscape**, perceived as open and accessible. This duality is not incidental, it is the central research problem.

4. Key Findings: The Problem of Invisible Boundaries

One of the most consistent conclusions emerging from research is that the cemetery's **historical extent is not clearly defined in the present landscape**. The original boundaries extended beyond the currently recognized and protected area, and portions of the former cemetery are now incorporated into adjacent urban zones.

This has two critical implications:

First, the spatial limits of the cemetery remain uncertain. The absence of clear demarcation means that contemporary users may unknowingly move through areas that were historically part of the burial ground.

Second, and more importantly, there is a high probability that **mass graves and individual burials remain located within areas currently treated as recreational space**. Historical sources indicate that the cemetery was used for wartime burials and possibly executions, yet these zones are not consistently marked or identified in the present-day terrain.

This condition creates not only a research gap but also an ethical tension between everyday use and the dignity of the site.

5. Toward a Non-Invasive Research Strategy

Given the religious, ethical, and legal sensitivities associated with Jewish burial sites, any further research must avoid intrusive methods. Archaeological practices in similar contexts across Central Europe demonstrate that even minimal excavation is highly restricted and often limited to superficial layers, precisely to prevent disturbance of human remains.

In this context, future research at the cemetery should prioritize **non-invasive investigative methods**. These may include:

- ground-penetrating radar (GPR) and other remote sensing technologies,
- analysis of historical maps and spatial overlays,
- environmental and topographical observation,
- integration of oral histories and local knowledge.

Such approaches would allow researchers to **reconstruct the historical boundaries of the cemetery and identify zones of burial, including mass graves, without physical interference.**

6. Recommendations

Future work on the site should move beyond descriptive research toward **spatial clarification and ethical mapping.**

A key priority should be the **precise determination of the cemetery's historical extent.** This requires synthesizing archival data with non-invasive spatial technologies to produce a more accurate understanding of where the cemetery originally extended, particularly in relation to areas now outside its formally recognized boundaries.

Equally important is the identification of **mass grave locations within the contemporary landscape,** especially in zones currently functioning as open recreational space. The absence of visible markers does not indicate absence of burial; rather, it reflects the historical processes of destruction and erasure that the site has undergone. Establishing the approximate location of such graves—without disturbing them—would significantly enhance both historical knowledge and ethical stewardship.

These efforts should not aim at physical reconstruction, but at **informational and interpretative clarity.** The goal is not to transform the space materially, but to make its hidden structure legible—through mapping, narrative, and carefully designed interpretative tools.

7. Conclusion

The New Jewish Cemetery in Lublin exemplifies the challenges of working with sites where history has been materially erased but not fully lost. Research conducted to date reveals a landscape in which memory persists in fragmented and often invisible forms, requiring new methodological approaches that combine historical scholarship with spatial sensitivity and ethical awareness.

The next stage of research must therefore focus on **making the invisible visible without violating the integrity of the site.** Non-invasive methods offer a way forward, enabling the reconstruction of boundaries and the recognition of burial zones while maintaining respect for the cemetery's primary function as a place of rest.

In this sense, the cemetery is not only an object of study but also a test case for how contemporary societies engage with difficult, layered, and partially erased pasts.

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