

Mr.Piotr Kuczera
Mayor of Rybnik
City Hall of Rybnik
ul. Bolesława Chrobrego 2, 44-200 Rybnik (POLAND)

Dear Mr. Mayor,

Your letter to me from May 29, 2015 reached me a short while before leaving to the United States for a long family visit. I was happy to read your positive attitude towards the Manneberg House Humanistic Center. In America, among others, I visited my cousin, Susan Manning (Manneberg) who is a professor of English Literature and Head of the English Dept. at Northwestern University in Chicago. We spent many hours going over documents concerning our family in Upper Silesia, and finally I reached the conclusion that my book, which is going to be published in a few months in Hebrew, is an accurate portrayal of the events as they are reflected in the documents in her possession. Susan's branch of the Manneberg family lived formerly in Loslau (Wodzislaw Slaski). They left after the First World War, mostly immigrating to Germany. My branch of the Manneberg family, as you well know, lived in Rybnik and its vicinity.

When I returned from my journey to America I received the optimistic report which Yair Rubin submitted to the Ghetto Fighters' Museum authorities. I consulted my cousins, Michael Manneberg (Switzerland), Klaus Manneberg (Germany), Susan Manning (U.S.A.) and Hillel and Joshua Manor (Manneberg) and Rina Roded (Manneberg) (Israel) about your ideas. After reading Yair's report I thought it would be right for me to make a progress report about the state of the project and to give my opinion concerning potential directions of development.

First of all, let me emphasize that I support your visionary decision to locate the Humanistic Center of Rybnik in the historic building of the Julius Roger German hospital. The foundation of this hospital was laid between 1868-1869 and it was opened in 1871. Unfortunately, the founder of the hospital died in 1865, before he saw his vision materialize. During the next years, more wings were added to this impressive building complex, in the neo-classic and late baroque architectural style. The hospital was known using its German name, "Juliuskrankenhaus". For this reason it is appropriate that the Humanistic Center will be located in this impressive and spacious building planned by a humanistic German doctor who loved mankind and the Upper Silesian culture. When delegations from all over the world will assemble to study the history of Rybnik, Silesia and Poland, Germany and Europe, they will realize that the building in which the Humanistic Center is located is on a main road with an important meaning in the history of Poland. It will suffice to point out the

change of the name of this road during the generations. At first it was Promenadestrasse, until 1922 while the area was part of Germany. Later, when Poland became independent with the end of World War I, its name was changed to 3 Maja, commemorating the first Polish constitution of 1791 and the establishment of the Polish republic. This name remained until the Nazi occupation of 1939, when it was changed to Hitlerstrasse. Then with the liberation from the Nazis and during the Soviet occupation the name of the road was changed to Armii Czervonej. Now the name has been changed back to 3 Maja St. Even if I was not absolutely correct with all the details, I have no doubt that studying the name changes of this road where the proposed Humanistic Center will be located helps us to understand the vast historical changes that Rybnik, Poland, the world and the Jews, underwent. In a picture on a postcard from the beginning of the 20th Century, showing the hospital, it is possible to see the Jewish Synagogue, which was destroyed during the Nazi occupation (see Bogdan Kloch and Dawid Keller, *An Outline History of Rybnik (until 1989)*, Muzeum w Rubniku, Rybnik 2010).

Across the street from the hospital there is today a public park, on the location where the Jewish cemetery was located before being destroyed by the Nazi authorities. They transferred the remains of the deceased of the Jewish community to a small empty lot behind the Manneberg house and adjacent to a church. This is a strange and miraculous coincidence!

When I first visited Rybnik, the birthplace of my ancestors, I searched in vain for the Jewish cemetery. To my dismay, nothing remained except for a very nice park made by the Nazis. I also visited the Rybnik Municipal Museum in the Rynek, and found a very nice ethnographic exhibition that revives past life in Upper Silesia, and depicts the history of the city and its neighborhood. I saw a very nice exhibit of traditional handicraft and occupations of the local population: mostly farmers and coal miners. In short, depictions of daily life of typical families of Rybnik and its vicinity. But I only saw a very minor exhibit relating to the prosperous Jewish community that was annihilated during the Second World War.

When I realized that nothing remained of the Jewish community I suggested at that time to commemorate the Jewish community in a special wing of the local museum that would be placed in the Manneberg house, my grandfather's former house at 15 Jan Sobieski St.

Since 1900 the building was owned by my grandfather, Josef Manneberg, a wealthy Jewish merchant, whose father, Leopold (Loebel) Manneberg was one of the heads of the Jewish community in Rybnik and served as the headmaster of the Jewish school there. In 1901 Leopold Manneberg received an award for his 25 years of service to the Jewish community of Rybnik. This was mentioned in the Jewish press in Germany in the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*. Josef Manneberg (born in 1874) became a Polish citizen after the

plebiscite in the 1920's, and in 1939 sold all his assets, including the building at Jan Sobieski St. and immigrated to Palestine with his immediate family, thus saving them. Most of the rest of the family was killed during the Holocaust. Only a few were saved, and the descendents live today in Israel, the U.S., Australia, England, Switzerland, Germany and Brazil.

Since I have been an educator all my adult life, I thought that a good way to commemorate the Jewish community of Rybnik that was annihilated would be in an educational program that will foster humanistic values of social justice and international cooperation. That is why I thought of the idea to persuade the Ghetto Fighters' Museum in Israel to support the establishment of this Humanistic Center in the Manneberg House, based on the model of the Humanistic Center operating at their museum. I was pleased to learn that they approved of this plan.

It is interesting to note that when Leopold Manneberg settled in Rybnik and became involved in the affairs and education of the Jewish community, this was the exact same time that the Julius hospital was being built. The Manneberg family in Rybnik actually moved there in the 19th century from Loslau. It was clear to me from the very beginning that the Manneberg House project that was intended to be the Humanistic Center, was too small to hold all the planned activities, and I thought that the Manneberg House could serve as a symbolic focal point, while the main educational activities would take place in other public buildings in the vicinity, but I didn't know where. I hoped at that time to receive the blessing of the Rybnik Municipality and the local museum. Fortunately everything is moving in a positive direction. I understand that you suggested an excellent idea with a lot of inspiration. You, as the Mayor with a background in History and Education, are the most suitable person to implement such a plan, and even with a broader vision than the original idea. It is clear to me that your plan to renovate the historical building will require support from external sources. Your willingness to approach the European Union in order to convince them to support this project financially leads me to believe that there is a good chance that this project will materialize, even though it will be implemented in stages over a long period of time. The fact that you have working with you serious people, such as your vice-mayor, Mr. Maslowski, as well as Mr. Yair Rubin from the Ghetto Fighters' Museum, who are willing to contribute a pedagogical program developed there, makes me optimistic. Knowing that in Rybnik there are also citizens such as Malgorzata Ploszaj, possessing knowledge and interest about the history of the Jewish community of Rybnik, I have no doubt that you will be successful.

Mr. Mayor, following your new initiative, I agree with you that it is right to transfer most of the Humanistic Center's functions (but not all of them) to the

renovated hospital building. This center will function according to my proposal of February 2014 and it will house the international education activity stated in the general outline:

Objectives of the program

- The center will nurture humanistic values, cross-cultural tolerance and understanding among nations, in the spirit of the basic values of liberal democracy;
- The center will commemorate the Jewish community that no longer exists and draw educational conclusions in the light of moral values;
- The center will enable study of the Holocaust, its racial, anti-Semitic, fascist and Nazi roots, with the purpose of avoiding its recurrence;
- The center will advance the study and research of Silesian history including Silesian Jewry as part of the study of the history of Poland, Germany and Israel.

Target group

Educators, teachers, schoolmasters, youth exchange group leaders, high school students, university students, scholars, public and community representatives and interested private people.

In the renovated hospital building it will be possible to have the following functions, according to my original proposal:

- A computerized study space that will enable research using books, photos and collections of archived material about the heritage of Upper Silesia.
- A computerized study space that will enable research using books, photos, and collections of archived material about the Jewish community of Rybnik and the vicinity.
- Meeting rooms for group workshops and discussions;
- Part of the building will be a hostel for visitors, including a small restaurant, preferably with a vegetarian menu, suitable for young people and Jews who observe the Jewish dietary laws. The hostel will serve delegations of youth and educators from abroad and from Poland. It will also serve for educational gatherings of the local population.
- The Humanistic Center will function as a place of study, a place for groups to meet, a starting point for excursions in the area and an administrative center facilitating pedagogic planning and operation of educational programs.

The Manneberg House (15 Jan Sobieski St.)

According to your new approach, the Manneberg House has to change its original intended functions and become a more focused element of the project:

- I suggest that the Manneberg House become a modest Jewish wing of the Rybnik Museum (one or two rooms would be enough), in which there will be a permanent exhibition of a Jewish merchant's home in the early 20th Century. The intention is to have a room set up similar to those exhibited in the Museum, and by so doing it will complete the missing Jewish part in the ethnographic part of the Rybnik Museum.
- The second room will be a computerized study room for genealogical research of Jewish families. This room will serve researchers and family members (not delegations) who can conduct their genealogical research using computers connected to the broad data bases in the Rybnik Museum, the Wodzislaw Slaski Museum and the Raciborz Archives (German and Polish). There are social networks such as "My Heritage" and "Geni" that help people make family trees, and I propose that the Manneberg House will have someone on hand to help people use these websites. In my opinion Mrs. Malgorzata Ploszaj could be such a person, or at least give much help and advice.

I'm aware that part of the Manneberg House is in private ownership. However, there are also a few rooms in the possession of the Municipality, being used for public services. These services, such as the Adult Education program, could possibly be transferred to the new building (the hospital building).

- I suggest that behind the Manneberg House (where there is a large parking lot today) there will be a small memorial to commemorate the remains of the Jewish cemetery. This memorial could be in the style of one of the tombstones of the old Rybnik Jewish cemetery, and it could show electronically, photos of the Jewish cemetery that were discovered recently and are in the Museum in Gliwice. These photos were exhibited last year in the Rybnik Museum.

I'd like to conclude with a few ideas and suggestions that might help you to establish and promote your initiative and vision.

The "Star and Concentric Circles Model":

As agreed, the educational activities in the Humanistic Center will be based on didactic materials developed in the Humanistic Center in the Ghetto Fighters' Museum in Israel. However, my opinion is that one of the unique features of the Humanistic Center in Rybnik could be a varied program of educational tours in the region. This program should be suited to the needs of each individual group, in other words each group will be able to pick the kind of tour most suitable from among the large variety of tours available, and to adapt these tours to meet their individual needs. Of course, the educational material, developed in Israel, will have to be modified to meet the needs of groups of students in Poland.

The usual model of Israeli delegations to Poland is sequential, in other words, they travel from one site to another. I, as an educator, do not think this is the correct way to study history in depth. It provides mostly shallow emotional reactions. For this reason I suggest the "Star" model, in which tours will leave Rybnik for short educational excursions of half a day, a full day, or even 2 days, after which the students will always return to the same place (the Humanistic Center) in order to discuss in depth the material that was discovered during the tours.

The tour program:

I think the tour program should be organized in geographic and thematic concentric circles. For example, the inner circle of half-day or full-day tours to visit and study Rybnik and its vicinity will include study sessions at the Rybnik Museum, the Mine Museum and the Jewish wing of the Museum (The Manneberg House) to study the past and the special character of the city. Another circle will deal with the Silesian experience and can include the area between Wladislaw Slaski and Katowice and will deal with the Silesian wars, the history of the Polish-German communities and may include trips to Gliwice and Opole. In this circle it is possible to demonstrate the uniqueness of Upper Silesia as a border area between cultures. The geographic location of Rybnik is attractive in order to study important chapters of European history, since it is adjacent to international borders that changed over the years: Prussia and the Habsburg Empire, Germany, Czech Rep., Austria, and the Russian Czarist Empire. Since Rybnik provides easy access to historical sites, such as in Krakow, the historical and cultural capital of Poland (150 km), Katowice, an important city in the history of modern Silesia and the meeting place of the first Congress of Hovevei Zion ("Lovers of Zion") (50 km) it is therefore easy to arrange tours with existing tour companies. However, what is important is that the planning and implementing of the tour programs will always be the responsibility of the Humanistic Center.

Another concentric circle with a wider radius could discuss the past of Silesian Jewry. For example Polish Jewish communities in Sosnowiec and Bendin, and German Jewish communities in Gliwice (Gleiwitz) and Opole (Oppeln). It is possible even to reach Wroclaw (Breslau) which was an important center in the development of modern Jewry (190 km).

Tours emphasizing the Holocaust:

It is obvious that the Holocaust issue will be either in the center or the background of all the activities. There are many possibilities to incorporate this important subject:

- A tour to Sosnowiec and Bendin, 2 important centers of Polish Jewry, and the location of 2 ghettos during the Nazi regime and the base for Jewish and Polish resistance during the War (60 km). To the best of my knowledge there is a wealth of material at the Ghetto Fighters' Museum that could be used for educational materials on this subject.
- A tour of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the most famous extermination site (85 km). Obviously, a guided tour here is mandatory, but interesting educational materials could also be provided to tie this subject to historical events that occurred in Rybnik, such as the Death March in the vicinity of Rybnik. For example a 2-day tour could begin in Auschwitz, continue by train to the Rybnik vicinity, and then continue by walking on the route of various memorial sites. It is possible to provide these tours during different seasons, but even in cold January, in order to feel some of the hardships of those marches.
- A 2-day tour to Theresienstadt (in the Czech Republic), a place to which many Silesian Jews were deported, especially educated and well-known people. In Israel there is a special museum devoted to Theresienstadt, and they could probably provide educational materials, through their cooperation with the Ghetto Fighters' Museum.

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As I understood from Yair Rubin's report, you agreed to implement the educational materials that were developed in the Humanistic Center in Israel. Their approach, as you know, is based on a Humanistic value system that fosters democratic principles and humanism, putting Man as a rational and moral entity in the center of society. Democracy emphasizes commitment to human rights as a top priority. In the Humanistic Center in Israel they believe that the Holocaust was possible when those 2 elements of modern civilization collapsed.

The pedagogical approach encourages an open dialogue in three circles: The Inner Circle – each one of the participants with himself when encountering new information;

The Group Circle – where everyone is invited to express his/her independent, personal opinion;
The Inter-Group Circle – where one can express both personal and group identity.

This educational process will take place in the large Humanistic Center which you are planning, and the Israeli team has a lot of experience and knowledge that they are willing to share with you. In addition, all the important educational activity will be based also on educational tours. Therefore I advise to prepare a detailed tour plan with the cooperation of teachers / professionals from the GF Museum, together with teachers/ professionals / local citizens from Rybnik who are interested. The mutual activity can be done through virtual meetings on Skype and e-mail. I believe the communication will be in English. For that purpose I suggest that the Rybnik municipality will get in touch with local teachers' organizations and teachers' colleges, as well as schools and the public in the Rybnik vicinity to locate interested people who are suitable to form international teams.

It is possible, for example, to suggest to a teachers' college projects for their students to prepare educational materials and guidelines to the didactical tours. This proposal could be attractive to all sides, and of course it could save money too.

Of course it is important to coordinate everything with Yair Rubin who is the main contact person. But I think it is important also to consult directly with Mrs. Raya Kalisman, the founder of the Humanistic Center in Israel, who was the first director of it, and also with Dr. Anat Livne, the Director General of the Ghetto Fighters' Museum, in which the Israeli Humanistic Center functions. Both of them have academic backgrounds in History and are very experienced in education.

I'd like to mention that Mrs. Kalisman has good connections with the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C., U.S.A. Through Mrs. Kalisman, you could make contact with this museum, perhaps to plan for delegations from the U.S. to visit Rybnik. It is also important, in my opinion for you to have direct contact with Dr. Livne. She might be able to help and provide backup for plans to recruit Israeli teachers to this project.

One of the vital elements to the success of any project is the recruitment of people who will be willing to contribute to the implementation of the idea and then to operate the educational center.

During all my professional life I always told my colleagues a good educational program should have a vision that touches the sky, but its feet should be touching solid ground. Mr. Mayor, I think in Hebrew and you think in Polish, but I believe we are talking the same educational language.

For your convenience I will sum up the main points of this letter:

1. I support your plans and vision to establish a Humanistic Center in the historic building on 3 Maja St.
2. I suggest that in the former Manneberg house at 15 Jan Sobieski St. will be a modest Jewish wing of the Rybnik Museum (approx. 2 rooms), in which there will be an ethnographic exhibition of a Jewish merchant in the beginning of the 20th Century, similar to the exhibits in the Rybnik Museum. In addition, there should be a computerized point for research of individuals (not delegations) on the subject of family trees and genealogical research.
3. I suggest putting a modest memorial to the Jewish community of Rybnik on the existing parking lot behind the Manneberg house, at the entrance to the passageway. This memorial could be in the style of one of the tombstones of the old Rybnik Jewish cemetery, and it could show electronically, photos of the Jewish cemetery that were discovered recently and are in the Museum in Gliwice.
4. It is important to prepare a detailed program of educational tours that will be a basis to the educational activities in the Humanistic Center, using international professional teams and local citizens from Rybnik, working together via internet tools.
5. It is important to start making contacts between people from Rybnik (from the Museum, the Municipality and ordinary citizens) and people at the Ghetto Fighters' Museum, and thus enlarging the circle of participants in this project.
6. It is also important to start practical steps with a pilot program, parallel with the endeavors to find funding for the large project. For example bringing teacher-student delegations from Israel to Rybnik to meet teachers, students and local people and to start a mutual educational dialogue.

Sincerely yours,
Dr. Eli Manneberg