

On-Site Learning and Memory Pedagogy: Transformations in Holocaust Education in Hungary, Croatia, and Serbia (1990–2025)

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Abstract

This study examines the development of Holocaust education in Hungary, Croatia, and Serbia from the 1990s to the present. It analyses the changes in national curricula, the transformation of the frameworks of history teaching, as well as the role of memory pedagogy and on-site (teaching at historical locations) education. In Hungary, the various versions of the National Core Curriculum (NAT), the reform of the Matura examination, and the process of centralisation have decisively shaped the place and depth of Holocaust teaching. Civil organisations have actively contributed to enriching the treatment of the subject, while commemorative days have reinforced its presence by sustaining collective memory. In Croatia, Holocaust education gradually gained prominence under the influence of independence and EU accession, particularly since the integration of visits to the Jasenovac Memorial Site into school practice. In Serbia, following the war years, international collaborations (IHRA, UNESCO) laid the foundations for the development of Holocaust education. The study also identifies shared challenges, including limitations of funding, shortcomings in teacher training, and the difficulties of engaging students emotionally. Furthermore, it highlights the broader societal impacts of Holocaust education, especially the strengthening of critical thinking, empathy, and democratic values. The analysis concludes that the key to future development lies in further support for teacher training, the integration of local narratives, and the expansion of both on-site and digital forms of education.

Keywords: Holocaust education; memory pedagogy; on-site learning; teacher training; international cooperation

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Introduction

The examination of Holocaust education can be understood at the intersection of history, pedagogy, and memory politics. The subject is not limited to the transmission of historical events but also involves analysing how these events are incorporated into collective memory and how they contribute to democratic education. The processing of the genocide committed during the Second World War has a particular importance in Central and Eastern European countries, where political interpretations of the past often influence curriculum regulations, textbook content,

and pedagogical practice.

In Hungary, Croatia, and Serbia, the issue of Holocaust education carries a distinctive significance. The historical experiences, political transformations, and educational reforms of these three countries have shaped in different ways the extent and emphasis with which the Holocaust appears in national curricula, textbooks, and teaching practice. Since the 1990s, following regime changes and the Yugoslav wars, all three countries have developed new educational strategies in which the reinforcement of national narratives, adaptation to European integration, and the role of civil organisations and international institutions have become defining factors.

The aim of this study is to present, within a comparative framework, the development of Holocaust education in Hungary, Croatia, and Serbia. Particular attention is devoted to curriculum changes that have shaped the structure and content of history teaching, as well as to pedagogical methods within the frameworks of memory pedagogy and on-site education that have provided opportunities for a deeper understanding of the Holocaust. The comparative approach makes it possible to explore how each country has integrated the Holocaust into its national teaching narratives, the challenges they have faced, and the progress they have made in aligning with European and international standards.

Changes in educational systems and their impact on the teaching of history

Hungary

From the early 1990s onwards, the Hungarian educational system underwent significant transformations that also affected the teaching of history, including Holocaust education. Following the political transition, the system shifted from state centralisation towards decentralisation, but in recent decades it has gradually returned to a more centralised model.

The National Core Curriculum (NAT), introduced in 1995, established a unified framework for public education, defining the content and time requirements of subjects. While the teaching of history covered both Hungarian and world history, modern history—including twentieth-century dictatorships and the events of the Second World War—received less emphasis (NAT 1995).

At this stage, the Holocaust did not appear as a highlighted topic but was addressed within the broader context of the Second World War. Twentieth-century history was typically taught towards the end of schooling, meaning that due to time constraints it was often marginalised (Forrás-Biró 2016).

In 2001, a national day of remembrance for the Hungarian victims of the Holocaust was introduced on 16 April. Commemorations and school projects supported the processing of the subject within education (EMMI 2020).

A milestone in history education was the introduction of the two-tier Matura examination in 2005, consisting of standard and advanced levels, which also functioned as a university entrance exam. The new system aimed to foreground the

interpretation of historical sources, thus developing students' critical thinking and analytical skills (Oktatási Hivatal 2005). The advanced level in particular placed strong emphasis on the use of sources, which contributed to a more nuanced understanding of historical events.

The Holocaust was included among the exam requirements, although it was not compulsory for all candidates. Exam questions could address the Holocaust or the comparison of totalitarian regimes, but the weight of the topic in practice largely depended on teachers' individual approaches and textbook editorial principles.

The 2011 Public Education Act brought significant changes. Education came under state control, and the establishment of the Klebelsberg Institutional Maintenance Centre (KLIK) in 2012 reinforced centralisation. In history, this resulted in the standardisation of curricula and textbooks (NAT 2012).

In the 2017 NAT, twentieth-century Hungarian history gained a prominent role, with a particular focus on strengthening the national narrative. The Holocaust remained part of the curriculum but, according to critics, was not presented with sufficient depth or context. Textbooks addressed the subject in varying ways, so its teaching largely depended on the pedagogical approach of individual teachers (Forrás-Bíró 2016).

The new NAT of 2020 introduced significant changes, also affecting the teaching of history. It placed an even stronger emphasis on Hungarian history, while certain aspects of world history were pushed into the background (NAT 2020). Critics highlighted that the Holocaust appeared in a less detailed manner and with reduced explanation of its wider contexts (Jancsák et al. 2021).

The available teaching time for the subject was also reduced, making it more difficult to address twentieth-century topics in depth. The national day of remembrance for Holocaust victims remained recommended in schools, but its content and depth often depended on the decisions of individual institutions (EMMI 2020). At the same time, civil organisations such as Centropa, the Haver Foundation, and Zachor continued to support teachers by providing alternative teaching materials and digital methodologies (Centropa 2021; Haver Alapítvány n.d.; Zachor 2022).

Over the past three decades, Hungarian history education has undergone significant transformations that have also influenced Holocaust education. While the 2005 reform represented progress in source-based teaching, the 2017 and especially the 2020 revisions of the NAT shifted the emphasis towards reinforcing the national narrative, which in some cases led to the marginalisation of Holocaust education. Nevertheless, school commemorations, civil organisations, and the recently established National Pedagogy of Memory (NEP 2024) continue to ensure that Holocaust remembrance remains part of public education.

Croatia

Croatia became an independent state in 1991, which resulted in major changes in its educational system. One of the key aims of introducing the new national curriculum was to strengthen Croatian identity; therefore, history teaching focused primarily on the national narrative, especially the Croatian War of Independence (Domovinski rat) (Ministarstvo obrazovanja 1991). Modern history received less

emphasis during this period, and the Second World War, including the Holocaust, was pushed into the background.

The Holocaust was not yet a highlighted theme in the curriculum but appeared within the broader narrative of the Second World War. Due to the emphasis on Croatian events, Holocaust teaching remained embedded in the local context, restricted mainly to a brief presentation of the history of the Jasenovac concentration camp (Foster & Karayianni 2017).

After the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995), Croatia's educational system stabilised, and secondary education was differentiated into grammar schools, vocational schools, and art schools (Ministarstvo obrazovanja, 1995). History teaching continued to centre on national events, especially the war of independence and the formation of the Croatian state. Coverage of the Second World War expanded, but discussion of Croatia's wartime political context—particularly the Independent State of Croatia and the Ustaša movement—remained limited (Jović 2006).

During this period, Holocaust education became somewhat more detailed. The curriculum included the Holocaust in its Croatian context, focusing above all on Jasenovac, the largest camp operated by the Ustaša regime. However, the subject still did not receive as much attention as in other Central European countries, and its teaching largely depended on teachers' individual approaches (OSCE/ODIHR 2006).

In 2010, Croatia introduced the Matura examination system, standardising secondary school-leaving exams, including history (Ministarstvo obrazovanja 2010). One important innovation was the introduction of a source-based approach, requiring students to analyse primary and secondary sources and draw their own conclusions.

In this new framework, Holocaust education became more detailed. Examination tasks not only required the description of historical events but also analytical exercises demonstrating the critical interpretation of sources. On the recommendation of the Ministry of Education, many schools organised study trips to the Jasenovac Memorial Site. These visits offered students the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the Holocaust in Croatia through first-hand experience of a historical location (Ministarstvo obrazovanja 2010).

Croatia's accession to the European Union in 2013 also brought major changes in education policy. Alignment with EU principles made the modernisation of the education system inevitable, and several new guidelines were introduced in history teaching (European Commission 2021).

One of the most important changes in history education was the broader coverage of twentieth-century history, including more detailed treatment of totalitarian regimes and the Second World War. During this period, Holocaust education became more prominent, supported by European initiatives such as the Erasmus+ programme and the educational projects of the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) (IHRA 2019).

The most recent curriculum reform, introduced in the 2019/2020 school year, further expanded the scope of history teaching and placed greater emphasis on

developing critical thinking (Ministarstvo obrazovanja 2020). In this new curriculum, Holocaust education was broadened to include new themes such as the history of antisemitism and the Roma Holocaust.

The latest reforms aimed to ensure that, in addition to acquiring factual knowledge, students would be able to critically interpret past events and understand their present-day implications. To this end, schools increasingly emphasise experiential pedagogy, incorporating study trips, museum visits, and interactive teaching materials into the learning process (Jasenovac Memorial 2021).

Overall, over the past three decades the Croatian educational system has gradually shifted from a predominantly national narrative towards a broader European framework. Holocaust education, initially marginal after independence, has become increasingly important since the 2000s, especially following EU accession, and today represents an integral element of Croatian memory pedagogy. Civil organisations such as Centropa, Documenta, and HERMES also play an important role in supporting this work.

Serbia

The wars leading to the dissolution of Yugoslavia had a profound impact on Serbia's educational system. During the 1990s, many schools were damaged or destroyed by bombings, and teaching was frequently interrupted.

History education in this period came under strong nationalist influence. The curriculum aimed at strengthening Serbian national identity, and the Second World War was interpreted accordingly. The teaching of historical events focused on the suffering of Serbian victims and the role of the partisan movement. The Holocaust was marginalised and mentioned only in the context of the German occupation. Textbooks contained minimal references to the Holocaust, and little was said about Serbia's Jewish communities among the victims (Foster & Karayianni 2018).

After the fall of the Milošević regime in 2000, the democratic government sought to modernise education and reduce ideological distortions through educational reforms (Ministarstvo prosvete n.d.). History teaching was reshaped with greater emphasis on objective sources and a move away from nationalist perspectives.

It was during this period that source-based approaches to Holocaust education first appeared. Teachers were encouraged to use survivors' testimonies, historical documents, and archival materials. Although changes were slow, this period marked the first step towards integrating Holocaust education into the Serbian history curriculum (Jovanović & Đureinović 2020).

In 2006, Serbia officially recognised Montenegro's independence and simultaneously developed a new National Core Curriculum, introducing a more centralised system (Ministarstvo prosvete n.d.). History teaching placed strong emphasis on Serbian national history, particularly medieval statehood and twentieth-century national suffering.

At this stage, Holocaust teaching became a compulsory element of the secondary school curriculum, but its presentation remained focused mainly on events in Serbia. Prominent attention was given to the Staro Sajmište camp, operated by German occupiers and local collaborators in Belgrade (Koljanin 2024), as well as

the Banjica camp, where mass internments were carried out and, alongside Jewish victims, Serbian and Roma prisoners were executed. However, the universal history of the Holocaust was not yet addressed in detail.

From 2010 onwards, Serbia began aligning educational reforms with European Union requirements, despite not being an EU member state. History teaching increasingly relied on tasks requiring the critical analysis of sources, and a Matura examination in history was introduced (Ministarstvo prosvete n.d.).

Holocaust education also developed: more detailed content was introduced into secondary schools, extending beyond Serbia to a broader European context. Educational institutions strengthened cooperation with international organisations such as the IHRA and UNESCO, which provided training and teaching materials for teachers (IHRA 2019).

After 2012, education was once again centralised, and the emphasis on Serbian national history within the curriculum increased. Although the Holocaust remained a compulsory topic, its teaching focused mainly on events in Serbia, such as the German occupation and the genocide perpetrated during by local collaborators (Ministarstvo prosvete n.d.). The international context did not receive sufficient attention, and the depth of teaching again depended largely on individual teachers.

From 2021 onwards, digitalisation has played an increasingly important role in Serbian education. The Ministry of Education launched programmes to develop online teaching materials, including digital resources for Holocaust education (Ministarstvo prosvete n.d.).

Alongside the introduction of modern teaching methods, international cooperation in Holocaust education has also intensified. Collaboration with the IHRA and UNESCO became closer, with these organisations continuing to provide teacher training, resources, and museum programmes. Initiatives for the development of the Staro Sajmište memorial site also form part of this process (UNESCO n.d.). In addition, civil organisations such as Centropa, Haver Srbija, Shoah Lab, Terraforming, and the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory play an important role in non-formal education and on-site learning.

Overall, Holocaust education in Serbia has shifted from the nationalist narrative of the 1990s towards a curriculum supported by international cooperation but still strongly focused on local events. While the introduction of source-based approaches and digital tools marked progress, the broader European context of the Holocaust remains only partially integrated into Serbian education.

Key achievements in Holocaust education

In all three countries, Holocaust education constitutes an integral part of history teaching. Beyond transmitting events and facts, the pedagogical aim is to foster critical thinking, tolerance, and a deeper understanding of human rights. A comparative analysis of Hungary, Croatia, and Serbia highlights the significant progress made in integrating the Holocaust into national curricula, while also pointing to remaining challenges. Examining structural similarities and differences in the edu-

cation systems, alignment with European principles, teaching methodologies, and the opportunities for on-site learning all underscore the importance of approaches adapted to historical and cultural contexts.

One of the most notable achievements in all three countries is the inclusion of compulsory Holocaust-related content in national curricula. This decision clearly reflects a commitment to addressing historical injustices and reinforcing democratic values within education systems.

Hungary

In Hungary, the National Core Curriculum stipulates that the Holocaust is to be taught in the 11th grade. The document emphasises the examination of national responsibility in the deportations, while also providing a broader European perspective. Among the developmental objectives is the study of the Holocaust process through the use of visual sources and written testimonies, and the recommended activities include visits to the Holocaust Memorial Center (Kerettanterv for Grammar Schools, Grades 9–12, History: 34–36).

Expected learning outcomes continue to include the ability of students to recall the causes and turning points of the Second World War as well as to understand the causes and key events of the Holocaust. Teacher trainings and educational resources are significantly supported by international programmes involving Israel, the United States, and Hungary, reflecting the country's proactive approach to developing teacher education and teaching materials.

Croatia

Croatia's education policy underwent a fundamental transformation following its accession to the European Union in 2013. The modernisation of education, necessitated by alignment with EU principles, included the mandatory integration of Holocaust education into secondary school curricula.

School-based programmes organised for Holocaust Memorial Day serve to sustain remembrance and provide students with opportunities for critical reflection on historical events. These reforms reflect Croatia's commitment to strengthening democratic values and shaping collective memory (Foster & Karayianni 2018).

Serbia

Although Serbia is not a member of the European Union, it maintains close cooperation with international organisations such as the IHRA and UNESCO. These partnerships have contributed to strengthening Holocaust education, enhancing teacher training, and expanding the availability of teaching resources.

The Serbian curriculum emphasises the study of local events, including the history of the Staro Sajmište concentration camp, which is one of the most significant memorial sites for Serbian Jewry. According to the IHRA country profile, statutory tasks include documenting, preserving, and presenting this memorial site (IHRA 2025). In addition, interactive and experiential pedagogical methods are gaining increasing importance, enabling students to connect with historical events on a more personal level beyond factual knowledge (TOLI 2021).

The role of on-site education and memory pedagogy

The role of on-site education and memory pedagogy has evolved continuously over the past three decades in all three examined countries. These educational forms have assumed an increasingly important place in history teaching, particularly in Holocaust education, though their pace and forms of development show significant differences.

Hungary

After the political transition, on-site education and memory pedagogy were not yet an integral part of history teaching. The introduction of the National Core Curriculum (NAT) in 1995 standardised the basic principles of history teaching; nevertheless, schools continued to rely primarily on textbook-based methods. The teaching of the Second World War and the Holocaust was not yet closely linked to educational practices at memorial sites (NAT 1995).

A turning point came with the 2005 reform of the Matura examination, which placed emphasis on source-based history education and thereby created opportunities for students to learn about the past not only through textbooks but also at authentic historical locations. It was during this period that on-site education began to spread, most visibly through study trips organised by schools. One of the first major initiatives was the visit to the Budapest Holocaust Memorial Center, which soon became an important location for memory pedagogy (EMMI 2020).

From the 2010s onwards, on-site education gained increasing prominence, with civil society organisations and museums assuming a decisive role. Centropa's programmes, for instance, sought to familiarise students with Holocaust history through survivor testimonies and experiences at historical sites (Centropa 2021). Memory pedagogical methods, alongside the institutionalised programmes of the Holocaust Remembrance Day in schools, were increasingly integrated into school-based initiatives.

Following the 2020 revision of the NAT, memory pedagogy did not lose importance but acquired new emphases. The expansion of digital education created opportunities to integrate online remembrance projects, such as the classroom use of digital archives from the USC Shoah Foundation and Centropa (NAT 2020). In on-site education, walking tours have also gained ground, allowing students to encounter events of the past as personal experiences through the specific historical locations.

Croatia

In the 1990s, the Croatian education system primarily focused on strengthening national identity. As a result, on-site education and memory pedagogy played little role in history teaching. In the years following the Yugoslav wars, curricula centred on the events of the War of Independence, while the Holocaust and visits to memorial sites remained marginal (Ministarstvo obrazovanja 1995).

With the introduction of the matura examination system in 2010, in addition to source-based tasks, visits to memorial sites became increasingly important. The

Jasenovac Memorial Site (Spomen-područje Jasenovac) was at this point more firmly integrated into educational programmes, and many schools organised study trips there, providing direct experiential learning opportunities for engaging with the Holocaust (Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja Republike Hrvatske 2020).

Croatia's accession to the European Union in 2013 gave new impetus to on-site education. With EU support, numerous museum and remembrance programmes were launched. These initiatives increasingly adopted interactive memory-pedagogical methods, involving students in the reconstruction of historical events (European Commission 2021).

Serbia

During the years of the Yugoslav wars, the disruption of educational institutions made the implementation of on-site education impossible. Schools deteriorated, and memory pedagogy was almost entirely sidelined (Jovanović & Đureinović 2020).

The democratic transition of the 2000s, however, created opportunities for the first initiatives. The memorial sites of the Staro Sajmište and Banjica concentration camps were incorporated into school programmes, though curricula continued to rely primarily on the Serbian national narrative (Foster & Karayianni 2018).

From the 2010s onwards, Serbia increasingly aligned its practices with European educational norms. Within the framework of memory pedagogy, visits to memorial sites became more common, and the development of digital teaching materials contributed to Holocaust education (UNESCO 2024). Cooperation with the IHRA also marked a significant step forward, providing training and educational resources that supported the spread of interactive teaching forms (IHRA 2019).

Challenges and opportunities

Although significant progress has been made in recent years in integrating Holocaust education in Hungary, Croatia, and Serbia, numerous challenges still hinder the effectiveness and depth of teaching. In addition to the development of programmes and curricula, there remain structural and practical problems that affect the quality and accessibility of Holocaust education for secondary school students. One of the most significant issues is the limitation of financial resources, which poses a particular challenge in Serbia, as well as in vocational schools in all three countries. The acquisition of teaching materials, textbooks, digital content, and interactive tools necessary for Holocaust education entails significant costs, which state and institutional budgets cannot always cover. In Hungary and Croatia, various European Union educational support programmes partially alleviate this problem, enabling the expansion of materials and the financing of study trips. However, these resources are not always available to all types of schools, especially vocational institutions, where history already has less weight in the curriculum. In Serbia, as the country does not benefit from direct EU support, funding is even harder to obtain, and thus educational institutions often lack the resources to provide modern tools and interactive opportunities for students. Consequently, Holocaust education is often limited to the transmission of theoretical knowledge

and cannot ensure the deeper, emotionally impactful learning experiences that are necessary to shape students' perspectives.

Another serious challenge is the lack of specialised teacher training, which is a particularly sensitive issue for the effectiveness of Holocaust education. Teachers often do not have specific preparation in how to teach this sensitive and complex subject. Holocaust education also involves social, ethical, and human rights issues and requires appropriate pedagogical and psychological readiness. The training programmes offered by Centropa and Zachor play an outstanding role in renewing Holocaust education, particularly in interactive and multimedia teaching methods. These organisations organise methodological workshops that help teachers teach the Holocaust more effectively and sensitively. Participants in these trainings become familiar with oral history-based storytelling techniques, the classroom use of digital resources, and peer-led learning strategies.

Centropa's annual Summer Academy is one of the most important teacher training programmes, attended by educators from different countries. During the event, participants deepen their knowledge of Jewish history and the possibilities of Holocaust education through study trips to historical sites, interactive workshops, and the analysis of digital historical sources. The Academy provides not only theoretical knowledge but also opportunities for teachers to build an international and professional network and share good practices. In addition, Centropa regularly organises seminars and webinars, which give teachers access to up-to-date teaching materials and methodological recommendations. The aim of these programmes is to ensure that Holocaust education does not remain confined to the presentation of historical events but becomes a learning process that fosters critical thinking, moral responsibility, and empathy.

In Croatia and Serbia, such specialised teacher training exists but is less widespread, meaning that many history teachers rely only on general didactic methods when teaching the Holocaust, which makes in-depth and interdisciplinary engagement with the subject more difficult. Consequently, students often lack the context and critical perspective that would allow them to interpret the Holocaust not only as a distant historical episode but also as a sequence of events that continues to affect present-day society.

A third major challenge is the emotional and intellectual engagement of students, which remains a serious obstacle in Holocaust education. The subject often confronts young people with brutal and tragic events with which they find it emotionally difficult to cope with. Teachers therefore need to apply methods that help balance emotional involvement with critical reflection. Digital tools and interactive approaches, such as Centropa's storytelling resources, Zachor's interdisciplinary methods, and the USC Shoah Foundation's video testimonies, offer promising solutions for fostering student engagement. Centropa's programmes combine survivor testimonies, photographs, and oral history interviews in digital form, allowing students to connect to the events of the Holocaust through personal stories (Centropa 2021.). Such interactive and multimedia sources can be particularly effective for the "screenager" generation, who connect more readily to historical events through visual and digital content. At the same time, on-site education, such as

visits to historical sites, also plays a key role in enhancing student engagement, since direct experience and experiential learning contribute significantly to deeper understanding and emotional identification.

The current challenges of Holocaust education thus focus primarily on financing, teacher training, and student engagement. Ensuring sufficient resources would allow for broader access to modern teaching tools, developing teacher training would help educators adopt more effective methods, and promoting interactive and experiential learning would foster stronger intellectual and emotional commitment among students. Addressing these challenges depends not only on internal educational reforms but also on the extent to which state and international organisations, civil initiatives, and pedagogical innovations can contribute in a coordinated manner to the continuous development of Holocaust education.

Recommendations for future development

In order to further improve Holocaust education, progress is needed in several key areas, which can contribute to more effective, in-depth, and sensitive engagement with the subject in schools. The following recommendations highlight the most important steps through which Holocaust education can contribute more strongly to developing critical thinking, fostering empathy, and preventing prejudice. The first and one of the most important directions is the expansion of teacher training, since the success of Holocaust education largely depends on teachers' methodological and substantive preparation. Wider access to specialised training programmes can significantly improve the quality of teaching by equipping teachers with the tools and knowledge necessary for a sensitive and multifaceted presentation of the subject. Initiatives such as Centropa and Zachor's training courses and IHRA-supported programmes have already proven their effectiveness, and their expansion would allow more teachers to benefit from them. It would also be important if methods supporting students' emotional and intellectual engagement, such as oral history, project-based learning, and digital storytelling, were given stronger emphasis in teacher education and professional development.

The second crucial area is increased funding, which would make textbooks, multimedia tools, and study trips more widely accessible. Interactive and experiential methods are playing an increasingly important role in Holocaust education, but they require modern digital devices and adequate educational infrastructure. The acquisition and maintenance of such tools demand substantial resources, which schools cannot always cover from their own budgets. Additional state and international funding would ensure that all students, regardless of school type or geographic location, have equal access to high-quality education. In Hungary and Croatia, EU support programmes can help reduce funding gaps, while in Serbia, stronger international cooperation is needed to provide teaching resources and tools to all schools.

The third key area is the strengthening of international cooperation, which can guarantee consistent and up-to-date approaches in Holocaust education. Partner-

ships with organisations such as IHRA, UNESCO, Centropa, Yad Vashem, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) give teachers access to the latest research findings, interactive materials, and training programmes. Such collaborations can prevent Holocaust education from being taught in isolation in each country, instead embedding it in an international context that fosters students' global perspectives. Teacher training, workshops, and study trips organised by international organisations also provide opportunities for teachers to exchange experiences and acquire innovative methods that make teaching more effective and engaging.

Finally, it is crucial to focus on local narratives, which can help students form a more personal connection with the history of the Holocaust. The historical experiences of individual countries and regions differ considerably, and learning about local events makes history more tangible for students. Initiatives such as incorporating the wartime history of Staro Sajmište in Serbia, or teaching about the “yellow-star houses” and the Budapest ghetto in Hungary, all contribute to presenting the Holocaust not merely as a distant historical episode but as part of the history of their own country, community, city, or even family environment. Similar initiatives in Croatia, such as teaching the history of the Danica Transit and Concentration Camp alongside Jasenovac, help students better understand their own country's role in historical events.

If these developments are realised, Holocaust education will not be limited to studying a historical event but will also help students recognise connections between past and present and reflect consciously on issues of prejudice, discrimination, and human rights violations. Education would thus not only transmit knowledge but also strengthen social responsibility and active citizenship.

The broader impacts of Holocaust education

The role of Holocaust education also lies in promoting a culture of tolerance, empathy, and critical thinking. Facing historical injustices encourages students to reflect on contemporary issues of discrimination, prejudice, and human rights. This aligns with European and global efforts to foster democratic resilience and prevent future atrocities (Jancsák et al. 2018). Recent studies show that Holocaust education helps students develop critical thinking skills and become more sensitive to social injustices. A comprehensive pedagogical study concluded that Holocaust education contributes to strengthening democratic values and deepening historical awareness, particularly in countries where the past remains the subject of social and political debate (Lucid Collaborative & YouGov 2020: 2). Further research demonstrates that the pedagogical use of oral history and historical interpretation fosters deeper emotional involvement and personal connections with past events. Working with historical sources, survivor testimonies, and primary documents helps students not only to treat the past as a set of facts but also to understand its moral and human dimensions (Kojanitz 2020). Another important aim of Holocaust education is to help students recognise and reject prejudice and hate speech.

According to OSCE research, educational programmes against antisemitism can contribute to dismantling social stereotypes and strengthening students' democratic skills (OSCE 2018). Such initiatives do not merely focus on understanding past events but also actively shape young people's civic engagement and moral sensitivity. The integration of Holocaust education in Hungary, Croatia, and Serbia reflects significant progress. Although challenges remain, the commitment to promoting critical thinking, remembrance, and tolerance provides hope for the future. By investing in teacher training, educational resources, and international cooperation, these countries can ensure that Holocaust education remains a part of history teaching, shaping informed and empathetic citizens for generations to come.

Conclusion

The examination of Holocaust education and its transformations in Hungary, Croatia, and Serbia has shown that the differing historical experiences and educational policies of the three countries determined the manner and depth of the subject's integration. While in Hungary the cyclical changes of curricular reforms and the process of centralisation frequently altered the place of the Holocaust within the curriculum, in Croatia the country's accession to the EU gave new impetus to strengthening the subject. In Serbia, following the war years, cooperation with international organisations played a key role in the gradual expansion of Holocaust education.

The study has demonstrated that, although the Holocaust has become a compulsory element of the national curricula in all three countries, the depth of engagement and the diversity of pedagogical methods vary considerably. Common challenges include limited funding, shortcomings in teacher training, and difficulties in ensuring the emotional engagement of students. At the same time, the growing role of memory pedagogy and on-site education, as well as the involvement of civil organisations, memorial sites, and international cooperation, have opened new opportunities.

Holocaust education in all three countries goes beyond the transmission of historical knowledge: it contributes to strengthening critical thinking, empathy, and democratic values. In the future, the key to further development lies in reinforcing teacher training, expanding educational resources, deepening international partnerships, and incorporating local narratives. In this way, the memory of the Holocaust will not only serve the processing of the past but will also actively contribute to fostering social responsibility and civic awareness for future generations.

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