

Jewish Community Relations Council

Partnership2Gether Summit in Budapest Brings Together Americans, Israelis, and Hungarians

Last month, Jewish Toledoans Deborah Orloff, Fagie Benstein, Hallie Freed, and Daniel Pearlman attended a Partnership2Gether Summit in Budapest, Hungary with almost 90 participants from 3 countries. Below is a summary written by Daniel.

Partnership2Gether (P2G) is a program of the Jewish Agency for Israel and Jewish Federations of North America that connects American Jewish communities with communities in Israel and Europe. Jewish Toledo is part of a consortium of 17 American communities that are paired with the city of Akko and the regional council of Matte Asher in Israel's Western Galilee region. Together, we are also paired with the Jewish community of Budapest, Hungary.

P2G promotes people-to-people relationships through cultural, educational, social, medical, and economic programs. Our Partnership consortium offers committees, youth leadership programs, school twinning connections, women's empowerment programs, and so much more. In total, there are over 40 pairings between American and Israeli communities.



A renovated synagogue in Budapest

On the first day of the Summit, we visited the Budapest Jewish University and met with professors for an introduction to Jewish life in Hungary. We then went on an interesting walking tour of some major historical sites including the "Shoes on the Danube" memorial honoring the Jews who were massacred by Fascist Hungarian militia belonging to the Arrow Cross Party in Budapest during World War II. We ended the day with a concert at the Israel Cultural Institute (ICI).

On the second day, we had a walking tour of the Jewish District of Budapest led by fantastic tour guides who taught us about the rich and long Jewish history of the city. We visited a few synagogues including the Dohány Street Synagogue, the largest synagogue in Europe and the third-largest in the world. We ate at the Mazal Tov Restaurant and had educational sessions about Partnership2Gether with a group of nine American, Israeli, and Hungarian artists who collaborate in a Partnership program called Create2Gether. Deborah Orloff, Professor of

Art and Associate Chair of the Department of Art at the University of Toledo, presented her photography project, and there was an exhibit opening.

On the third day, we went to the Rumbach Synagogue where we visited a Jewish nonprofit startup accelerator before walking to the Ghetto Wall Memorial. We ate at a Kosher restaurant and then had more educational sessions, including a session about the SlidingDors program for second generation Holocaust survivors led by Fagie Benstein. We ended the day with dinner on a Danube River cruise with breathtaking views of the city.



Deborah Orloff smiling in front of her exhibit with Tanja Ronen, Partnership volunteer in Israel

We started the fourth day with more educational sessions about Partnership, this time focusing on shared society organizations working to bring Jewish and Arab residents of our Partnership region together. One of the presenters of this program was Mirit Sulema from the Akko Educators' Kibbutz, which I had visited the week prior. We ate lunch at a different Kosher restaurant before touring the Jewish day school and the Jewish hospital – the only Jewish hospital in Europe – which just opened a new wing. Our final dinner together was joined by the Israeli Ambassador to Hungary, H.E. Yacov Hadas-Handelman, and other dignitaries.

Our last day included a visit to the Obuda Synagogue and some bittersweet goodbyes to new and old friends alike.



A remaining section of the Budapest ghetto wall, built in 1944 even as the Nazis knew they would lose the war

Reflecting on this Summit, I have a few takeaways. First, the ties of Jewish Peoplehood are stronger than national borders or the oceans separating us. Despite our different passports, we were all passionate about connecting Jews in America, Israel, and Hungary. Second, Budapest is a fascinating city filled with lots of history, culture, and excellent food.



The inside of Budapest's Jewish day school

But what was, to me, perhaps the most meaningful aspect of this Summit was experiencing Jewish life in Hungary today. Jewish life in Europe is not "dead" as I've heard people claim before. The Holocaust did unimaginable damage to the continent that once had the largest Jewish community in the world. And rising antisemitism across Europe is leading to more Jewish emigration from Europe. But the claim that Jewish life no longer exists in Europe, or that it is small and weak, cannot be further from the truth. Budapest has over a dozen active synagogues, an Israel Cultural Institute, two Kosher restaurants, a Jewish day school, and the only Jewish hospital in Europe. Hungary also has its own Jewish denomination called Neolog, which in American terms is perhaps most like the Conservative Movement but is distinct in many ways. Budapest is not necessarily representative of Jewish life in Europe, but it would be disingenuous to conflate the situation of Jews in France with those in Hungary.

Partnership2Gether helps bring people together to highlight our similarities and celebrate our differences. When people meet one another, they learn more about them and dispel any stereotypes or misconceptions about them. This trip was educational for me, as it helped teach me about a thriving Jewish community in Europe and about how Jewish Americans and Israelis in the Western Galilee continue to prioritize building relationships with one another and with other Jewish communities around the world.

You can visit our Partnership region of Akko and Matte Asher in Israel's Western Galilee by participating in the Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo's November 2023 Community Mission to Israel! On this nine-day mission, we will visit Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, the south, and the north of Israel. To learn more, please complete a short interest form at form.jotform.com/jewishtoledo/mission. More information coming soon.