



## Report

# URIS study trip to Western Ukraine

10 June to 16 June 2018

By Oliver Sterchi and Luca Thoma

URIS went on a seven-day study trip to Ukraine in June 2018 with students and other members of the University of Basel, led by Sophia Polek and Benjamin Schenk. The focus of the trip was the search for historical traces of the coexistence of different cultures and religions in Galicia, Bukovina and Podolia. Many of us had attended courses and lectures given by the URIS fellows at the University of Basel in recent semesters. The journey took us to Lviv, Chernivtsi and Kamianets-Podilskyi. We spent the second half of the week in Lviv, where URIS in cooperation with the Hamburg-based charitable foundation ZEIT-Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerius organised a workshop on current research on Ukraine at the Center for Urban History of East Central Europe, to discuss ongoing research projects in the field of Ukrainian Studies.

After a long day's journey with a stopover in Warsaw, we arrived in Lviv on Sunday evening. For many on the trip it was their first journey to Western Ukraine, so they were surprised by the Central European flair of the former Hapsburg metropolis. As the former administrative centre of the crownland Galicia and Lodomeria, «Lemberg», as the city was known in German, boasts an urban vitality and a rich architectural and culinary heritage — Vienna coffee house meets *Khrushchyovka*.

On Monday morning we set off again and were driven by bus through the Galician landscape to Chernivtsi in Bukovina. Here in this somewhat sleepy provincial town, whose spruced-up town centre testifies to the splendour of times gone by, we searched for traces of the Jewish life that has largely been lost. But we discovered, not without some surprise, that after the upheavals of the 20th century, Judaism seems to be undergoing a renaissance in Bukovina.

Mykola Kushnir, the director of the Jewish Museum in Chernivtsi, took us on a highly informative guided tour, showing us the sites of the old Jewish Chernivtsi that have disappeared or been converted as well as the revived centres of the Jewish communities, including two synagogues.



The following day we imagined ourselves transported back in time to the Middle Ages and the early modern era in Kamianets-Podilskyi in the historical region of Podolia, where we visited the old town and the meticulously restored castle buildings. A chance acquaintance in front of the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul proved particularly knowledgeable about the city. The cathedral is still in use today and features a converted minaret now topped by a statue of the Virgin Mary. The man told us about Kamianets-Podilskyi's recent and more distant past, and especially about the astonishing interweaving, still visible today, of different cultures, faiths and languages within a very small area.

We spent the last days of the excursion at the Center for Urban History in Lviv, where we were able to meet at the invitation of founder and director Harald Binder. Workshop contributions from the ZEIT scholars and URIS fellow Valeriya Korablyova on their ongoing research projects gave us insight into flashpoints and challenges currently facing research in and about Ukraine. The workshop was accompanied by a varied supporting programme, including a number of guided city tours and a meeting with students of the local Catholic University. In the evening we had a drink together and reflected on these eventful days. This led to a lot of interesting discussions and contacts to the ZEIT-Stiftung foundation and to students and researchers from Lviv. On Saturday some of the group then travelled back to Switzerland, while the others explored other parts of Ukraine on their own.



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