

Environment as Spiritual Capital.

An Argument for Restoring Vilnius's Oldest Jewish Cemetery.

We develop a concept of "spiritual capital" which has suggested itself in the public debate regarding the future of the Vilnius Sports Palace, a large forum which the Soviets built in the 1960s on a Jewish cemetery which is the oldest in Vilnius and perhaps all of the Baltic states. This concept of spiritual capital is relevant for analyzing cultural surroundings but could also perhaps ground a healthy human relationship with natural surroundings.

The Sports Palace is no longer safe for use, and so there is an opportunity to dismantle it, and restore the cemetery, perhaps as a symbol of empathy for the loss to the Holocaust of Lithuania's world renowned Litvak community. Instead, the city is preparing to use European Union funds to renovate the Sports Palace for use as a convention center. The city is satisfied to have won the approval of the official Lithuanian Jewish community, and is not concerned by the disrespect felt by many Litvaks in Lithuania and around the world.

The actions of the city and economic developers are understandable from the point of view of typical economic thinking. In order to explain the value of restoring the cemetery, there is a need to appeal to the reality of additional dimensions. An example in Lithuania is the Hill of Crosses, which the Soviets kept bulldozing but Lithuanians kept restoring. It is a holy site which Pope John Paul II visited in 1993. Now consider the value of such a site. It is a real challenge to intentionally create such a site. And it typically takes decades or centuries. But it can offer longstanding benefits as a reference point that has a rich meaning for a wide variety of people. We sense that tangibly - we may say that it has a very strong aura. It also offers vast potential for leveraging its meaning in developing ever new symbols. For all of these reasons we may think of it as "spiritual capital" that we might invest in to develop and exploit. Such a concept makes clear that **dismantling the Sports Palace can, from the point of view of "spiritual economics", yield a huge reward if Lithuania can understand itself as a country which mourns Jews, loves Jews and welcomes Jews.** Alternatively, Lithuania could claim the Soviet atrocity as its own, and identify itself with Soviet heritage rather than Jewish heritage.

We develop these notions of "spiritual capital" and "spiritual economics" from a conceptual and even metaphysical point of view. The human mind may be described in terms of interactions between the unconscious (which tells us what we know) and the conscious (which tells us what we don't know). Experimental psychologists Kahneman and Tversky referred to these as System 1 and System 2. We consider a model where one's conscious mind invests in one's unconscious mind, which then later supports one's conscious mind. We may think of our unconscious minds as interlinked in a vast network which our conscious minds work to shape but must also work to resist. We can then think of "spiritual capital" as our investment in that cultural network and "spiritual economics" as describing our interactions with that network. In this way, we can consider our relationship with our cultural surroundings. We then consider what this means for our natural surroundings. In what sense does nature have spiritual capital? How do we interact with that and foster that?

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