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## THE LEGACY OF ERICH MENDELSON – EXPRESSION AND CONTEXT IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF MODERN MOVEMENT. THE WAY TO THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE LIST

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**ABSTRACT:** In 2021, the international community of architectural and art historians started the so called “Erich Mendelsohn Initiative”, with the goal of inscribing the architectural legacy of Erich Mendelsohn on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Despite some efforts, the final list of nominated buildings, along with the Statement of their Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and the title of the nomination has not yet been established. This article presents a new, authorial look at Erich Mendelsohn’s legacy in view of the UNESCO World Heritage. It analyses the global significance of Erich Mendelsohn’s legacy in the opinions of leading architectural historians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The article puts forward the preliminary list of Mendelsohn’s realisations which should embody his legacy, the criteria for assessment their historical value and the proposed title of the nomination. The main part of the article is defining the first two sections of the “Statement of Outstanding Universal Value”, to be presented in the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. According to the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* they are: the “Brief synthesis”, and the “Justification for Criteria”. In conclusion, the author argues, that the most significant qualities of Erich Mendelsohn’s architectural works are their strong expression and their dialog with the local context. Therefore, these features should be the main subjects of the Outstanding Universal Value Statement, the title and in the main narrative points of the nomination dossier for the inscription of Erich Mendelsohn’s legacy on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

**KEY WORDS:** Erich Mendelsohn, UNESCO, Outstanding Universal Value

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## 1. Introduction

The initiative launched in 2021 by the international community of architectural and art historians called the “Erich Mendelsohn Initiative” is focused on inscribing the architectural legacy of Erich Mendelsohn on the UNESCO World Heritage List. It became also the theme of the Fourth International Erich Mendelsohn Conference in Olsztyn in March 2024 entitled „Erich Mendelsohn’s Architectural Legacy on its Way to the UNESCO World Heritage List”. The conference was organised in the architect’s hometown city (Olsztyn, formerly Allenstein), exactly on the one hundred thirty seventh anniversary of his birth. It was yet another meeting of the “Erich Mendelsohn Initiative” circle, following meetings in Berlin and Haifa, with the aim of preparing the nomination dossier for the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.

Due to the location of the Mendelsohn’s works - within the borders of several countries including Germany, Poland, Great Britain, Israel, Russia, Norway, the Czech Republic, and the United States, the nomination dossier will be prepared as transnational one, by several countries as States Parties to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. It will also be a ‘serial’ nomination<sup>1</sup>, covering many different buildings as components. Such nomination requires the close international cooperation on many levels, one of which is the International Council of Monuments and Sites ICOMOS and the other is the “Erich Mendelsohn Initiative”.

The subject of the conference in Olsztyn was the preliminary list of architectural objects on the territory of Europe and Israel to be presented as a part of Erich Mendelsohn’s legacy - their authenticity, state of conservation and most significant historical value. However, despite the warm discussion during the conference, neither the list of nominated buildings nor the title of the nomination dossier and the statement of their Outstanding Universal Value have been finalised.

The aim of this article is, on the one hand, to summarise the results of the work carried out so far by the “Erich Mendelsohn Initiative”<sup>2</sup> and on the other hand, to present a new, authorial look at Erich Mendelsohn’s legacy from the perspective of the UNESCO World Heritage. The article is especially focused on the problem of the main historical significance of the Mendelsohn’s heritage, which should be put forward as its Outstanding Universal Value according to the UNESCO World Heritage criteria.

As yet, in the existing scientific literature the problem of Erich Mendelsohn’s legacy in the context of the UNESCO World Heritage has been presented in a book entitled *Positioning: Erich Mendelsohn and the Built Heritage of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. It was published in 2024, in the series „ICOMOS Journals of the German National Committee” no. LXXXII. Certainly, in the overall historical assessment of Erich Mendelsohn’s heritage we can find more than a few

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<sup>1</sup> *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (p. 39). World Heritage Centre (WHC) 19/01, 10 July 2019.

<sup>2</sup> The author of this article also belongs to „Erich Mendelsohn’s Initiative” and took part in those works.

extensive monographs, including those written by such historians as: Arnold Whittick<sup>3</sup>, Wolf Von Eckardt<sup>4</sup>, Oscar Beyer<sup>5</sup>, Bruno Zevi<sup>6</sup>, Kathleen James-Chakraborty<sup>7</sup>, Regina Stephan<sup>8</sup> and Carsten Krohn & Michele Stavagna<sup>9</sup>. Mendelson's architectural works have been also analysed in the encyclopaedias and books that generally outline the development of the 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture. I quote some of them in the following section.

## 2. The global significance of Erich Mendelsohn's legacy in the history of architecture: expression and context

Erich Mendelsohn (1887-1953) was one of those great architectural individuals, who left their distinctive mark on the development of architecture in the first half of the 20th century. All books dealing with the history of modern architecture worldwide present his work and discuss his impact on the Modern Movement. However, many historians also stress the particularity, the individual and personal style of his creations. The key to understand Mendelsohn's specific approach to architecture was his life story and background.

Mendelsohn was born in Allenstein the region of East Prussia in Germany (now Olsztyn in Poland) in 1887 into the Jewish family. His architectural career, which began with his first youthful work the Bet Tahara cemetery complex in Allenstein (Olsztyn) in 1912-1913, was interrupted at its inception by the outbreak of the First World War. It was resumed in 1919, and developed with great success until 1933 in Berlin, when the architect was forced to leave Germany to escape the rule of the Third Reich and the German Nazis. Mendelsohn resumed his architectural activity first in Great Britain, then in 1934 in Mandatory Palestine (now Israel), and from 1941 in the United States, where he lived until his death in 1953. The need to restart his professional career by migrating to another country had significant impact on Mendelsohn's life and work. As he moved from country to country one can identify turning points in the development of his architectural practice.

The entire creative period of Mendelsohn's career is linked to the epoch of Modernism (Modern Movement) in world architecture. It was largely a revolutionary formation that introduced a new aesthetic category into architecture, such as functionalism, anti-decorativeness and rationalism,

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<sup>3</sup> Whittick A. (1940). *Erich Mendelsohn*, first ed. London: Faber and Faber Ltd; Whittick A. (1956). *Erich Mendelsohn*, second ed. New York: F.W. Dodge Corporation.

<sup>4</sup> Von Eckardt W. (1960). *Eric Mendelsohn*, first ed. New York: George Braziller, Inc.

<sup>5</sup> Beyer O. (ed.) (1967). *Eric Mendelsohn: Letter of an Architect*, first ed. New York: Abelard-Schuman, Inc.

<sup>6</sup> Zevi B. (1970). *Erich Mendelsohn Opera Completa, Architetture E Immagini Archettoniche*, first ed. Milano: Etas Kompass; Zevi B. (1997). *Erich Mendelsohn Opera Completa, Architetture E Immagini Archettoniche*, second ed. Milano: Testo & Immagine.

<sup>7</sup> James-Chakraborty K., (1997). *Erich Mendelsohn and the Architecture of German Modernism*, first ed. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Stephan R. (ed.) (1999), *Eric Mendelsohn: Architect, 1887-1953*, New York: The Monacelli Press.

<sup>9</sup> Krohn C. Stavagna M. (2022). *Erich Mendelsohn. Buildings and Projects*, first ed. Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag GMBH.

and their close connection with new constructions and materials. Erich Mendelsohn took an active part in these changes and with energy advocated modern forms of artistic expression (Fig. 1). However, despite his fascination with modernity, he did not fully accept all the proposals of the avant-garde modernists, whose rigid rationalism was unacceptable to him<sup>10</sup>. On the one hand, like Walter Gropius, Mies van der Roche and Le Corbusier, he believed that „*certainly, the primary element in architecture is function*”, but on the other hand, he clearly stated that „*function without sensibility remains mere construction. (...) Thus, function plus dynamics is the challenge*”<sup>11</sup>.



Fig. 1 The Einstein Tower in Potsdam, E. Mendelsohn, 1918-22, the icon of Expressionism, 2015 (source: Astrophysikalisches Institut Potsdam, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Einsteinturm\\_7443a.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Einsteinturm_7443a.jpg))

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<sup>10</sup> Von Eckardt W. (1960). *Erich Mendelsohn* (p. 11), first ed. New York: George Braziller, Inc.; Banham R. (1967). *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (p. 181), second ed. New York – Washington: Praeger Publishers; Curtis W. J. R. (1996). *Modern architecture since 1900* (p. 188), third ed. London-New York: Phaidon.

<sup>11</sup> Von Eckardt W. (1960). *Erich Mendelsohn* (pp. 11, 113), first ed. New York: George Braziller, Inc.

This individual and emotional approach to architecture meant that in the 1920s Mendelsohn became one of the main representatives of German and European Expressionism<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, his original artistic visions and sensitivity to the context of place and tradition<sup>13</sup> moved him away from the mainstream of Functionalism and International Style. The loudly declared ideological assumptions of these formations sought the universality in architecture, cutting themselves off from any local or regional influences. Mendelsohn, next to Frank Lloyd Wright was the first great modernist who broke through this ideology.

In the broad historiography of Erich Mendelsohn's architecture, there are two distinguishing and special characteristics that are often emphasized: strong expression and dialogue with the local context. His expressive, dynamic and sculptural creations were commented on by all the leading architectural historians who presented the general outline of the 20th century architecture, including Arnold Whittick<sup>14</sup>, Reyner Banham<sup>15</sup>, Leonardo Benevolo<sup>16</sup>, Nicolaus Pevsner<sup>17</sup>, Henry-Russell Hitchcock<sup>18</sup>, Vittorio M. Lampugnani<sup>19</sup>, William J. R. Curtis<sup>20</sup>, David Watkin<sup>21</sup> and Kenneth Frampton<sup>22</sup>. They saw Mendelsohn mainly as a great expressionist, the creator of

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<sup>12</sup> Benevolo L. (1964). *Geschichte der Architektur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (p. 82), vol. II, first ed. München: Verlag George D.W. Callwey; Lampugnani V. M. (ed.) (1986). *Encyclopaedia of 20th Century Architecture* (p. 94), first ed. London and New York: Thames and Hudson Ltd.; Watkin D. (1992). *A History of Western Architecture* (p. 514), first ed. London: Laurence King Publishing; Frampton K. (1992). *Modern Architecture. A Critical History* (p. 120), third ed. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.; Curtis W. J. R. (1996). *Modern architecture since 1900* (pp. 186-187), third ed. London-New York: Phaidon.

<sup>13</sup> Von Eckardt W. (1960). *Eric Mendelsohn* (p. 23), first ed. New York: George Braziller, Inc.; Hitchcock H-R. (1977). *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (p. 524), fourth ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press; Curtis W. J. R. (1996). *Modern architecture since 1900* (p. 382), third ed. London-New York: Phaidon; Nay E. (2024). *Erich Mendelsohn: Place, Identity and Exile*, [in:] *Positioning: Erich Mendelsohn and the Built Heritage of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (p. 63), *ICO-MOS Journals of the German Nation Committee*, no. LXXXII (2024).

<sup>14</sup> Whittick A. (1950). *European architecture in the twentieth century* (pp. 203-205), vol. 1, first ed. London: C. Lockwood.

<sup>15</sup> Banham R. (1967). *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (pp. 168, 173-174, 181), second ed. New York – Washington: Praeger Publishers.

<sup>16</sup> Benevolo L. (1964). *Geschichte der Architektur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (pp. 76-82), vol. II, first ed. München: Verlag George D.W. Callwey.

<sup>17</sup> Pevsner N. (1976). *Historia architektury europejskiej/ An Outline of European Architecture* (pp. 411, 413, 420), first ed. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Artystyczne i Filmowe.

<sup>18</sup> Hitchcock H-R. (1977). *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (pp. 488-489), fourth ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

<sup>19</sup> Lampugnani V. M. (ed.) (1986). *Encyclopaedia of 20th Century Architecture* (pp. 214-215), first ed. London and New York: Thames and Hudson Ltd.

<sup>20</sup> Curtis W. J. R. (1996). *Modern architecture since 1900* (pp. 186-188), third ed. London-New York: Phaidon.

<sup>21</sup> Watkin D. (1992). *A History of Western Architecture* (pp. 514-515), first ed. London: Laurence King Publishing.

<sup>22</sup> Frampton K. (1992). *Modern Architecture. A Critical History* (pp. 120-121), third ed. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.

the famous Einstein Tower, the author of the expressive, curvilinear department stores (Fig. 2) and sculpturally conceived factories or synagogues. Many historians have also emphasised Erich Mendelsohn's "structural expressiveness of materials", especially the most advanced ones like reinforced concrete, steel and glass<sup>23</sup>.



Fig. 2 The former Petersdorff Department Store in Wrocław, E. Mendelsohn 1927-28, the example of Streamline Modernism in the urban context (source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Petersdorff\\_Department\\_Store#/media/File:Kameleon\\_in\\_Wroc%C5%82aw,\\_September\\_2022\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Petersdorff_Department_Store#/media/File:Kameleon_in_Wroc%C5%82aw,_September_2022_01.jpg))

However, the contextual and dialogical approach to architecture, although present in all his works (Fig. 3), has been stressed by historians mainly in relation to his work outside Europe. Mendelsohn's biographers pointed to an important change in his architecture when he had migrated to Israel (Fig. 4), as a response to a much hotter climate and different cultural

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<sup>23</sup> Frampton K. (1992). *Modern Architecture. A Critical History* (p. 120), third ed. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.; Lampugnani V. M. (ed.) (1986). *Encyclopaedia of 20th Century Architecture* (p. 216), first ed. London and New York: Thames and Hudson Ltd.; Von Eckardt W. (1960). *Eric Mendelsohn* (p. 13), first ed. New York: George Braziller, Inc.

tradition<sup>24</sup>. The architect wanted to adapt modernist forms to these conditions and was one of the first to successfully combine the language of international Modernism with the local context and material (stone), making - as William J. R. Curtis put it - “a great East-West synthesis, a fusion of new and old, regional and universal”<sup>25</sup>. Significantly, when Mendelsohn migrated to the United States in 1941, and to San Francisco in 1945, his architecture changed once more. In the four built in the Midwest synagogues he established a new, impressive architectural model of a synagogue complex, which has now become almost standard<sup>26</sup>.



Fig. 3 Mendelsohn's House in Berlin, E. Mendelsohn, 1928-1930 – the Functionalist architecture in relation to the landscape (photo Jadwiga Urbanik, 2022)

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<sup>24</sup> Von Eckardt W. (1960). *Eric Mendelsohn* (pp. 24-25), first ed. New York: George Braziller, Inc.; Hitchcock H-R. (1977). *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (p. 524), fourth ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press; Curtis W. J. R. (1996). *Modern architecture since 1900* (pp. 381-382), third ed. London-New York: Phaidon.

<sup>25</sup> Curtis W. J. R. (1996). *Modern architecture since 1900* (p. 382), third ed. London-New York: Phaidon.

<sup>26</sup> Von Eckardt W. (1960). *Eric Mendelsohn* (p. 29), first ed. New York: George Braziller, Inc.



Fig. 4 The Schocken Library, Jerusalem, E. Mendelsohn, 1935-36 – different climate, different tradition, different building material (photo Jerzy Ilkosz, 2023)

In summary, these two features – **expression and dialogue with the context** – which in the opinions of leading architectural historians of the 20th century determine the global significance of Erich Mendelsohn’s legacy should, in my view, be the main narrative points in the nomination dossier for inscribing the architect’s legacy on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

### 3. Preparation of the UNESCO nomination: the list of nominated buildings

All and each of the buildings and complexes presented in the serial nomination must meet very high requirements, specified in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*<sup>27</sup>. In relation to the architectural heritage they must have high artistic and historical value, the authentic and integral material substance, be in a good state of conservation and – which is equally important – have a management plan and conservation plan set up. These qualities are to be reported in the nomination dossier as part of the “Statement of Outstanding Universal Value” and as part of the plan for “Protection and Management of the Property”<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (p. 39), World Heritage Centre (WHC) 19/01, 10 July 2019.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, Annex 5 (pp. 104-105).



Hence the conclusion that Erich Mendelsohn's works presented as components of his legacy to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List should be selected very carefully. Fortunately, many of his famous creations have survived to the present day, although their state of preservation and protection vary. High demands on authenticity, protection and conservation, however, exclude a part of Erich Mendelsohn's oeuvre from the potential list of nominations<sup>29</sup> (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5 Power Station of the Red-Banner Textile Factory, Petersburg, E. Mendelsohn, 1925-26 – due to the bad state of preservation excluded from the nomination (source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red\\_Banner\\_Textile\\_Factory#/media/File:Power\\_Station\\_of\\_the\\_Red\\_Banner\\_Textile\\_Factory\\_SPB.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Banner_Textile_Factory#/media/File:Power_Station_of_the_Red_Banner_Textile_Factory_SPB.jpg))

Unfortunately, there are dozen of famous and highly admired Mendelsohn's buildings which do not meet these requirements. For example, his famous villas in Berlin – the semi-detached houses on Karolingerplatz (1921-1922), the Sternfeld House (1923-1924), the Bejach House (1926-1927), and the Mendelsohn House (1928-1930) - are inhabited by the owners who are reluctant to have them listed as a worldwide heritage and are very protective of their privacy. Likewise the private owners of the Russell House in San Francisco (1948-1951). In the case of two well-known complexes by Mendelsohn in Russia – The Red-Banner Textile Factory (1925-1926) and the Three Patriarchs' Lodge (1924-1926) – the owners and users have brought them to a very bad condition. In turn, the famous Hat Factory in Luckenwalde in Germany (1921-1923) was

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<sup>29</sup> The analysis of authenticity, integrity and state of conservation of the Erich Mendelsohn's legacy was the subject of the "Erich Mendelsohn Initiative" on-line symposium on the 14th and the 15th of July in 2021, when the participants from different countries presented the so called Template Surveys concerning the particular Mendelsohn's buildings.

partly demolished yet in 1930s, than reconstructed in 2001, but - although it is now protected as a monument - the reconstructed roof of the main building did not meet the conditions of authenticity. Similarly, the Rudolf Mosse publishing house in Berlin (1921-1923) and the VOGA complex with the Universum Cinema in Berlin (1925-1931) also underwent changes that resulted in the loss of their authentic substance. On the other hand, the big medical and university complexes built by Mendelsohn in Mandatory Palestine – the Hadassah University Hospital in Jerusalem (1934-1939), the Medical Institute of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (1934-1939), the Government Hospital in Haifa (1936-1938), the Daniel Wolf Laboratories in Rehovot (1938-1941) and the Agricultural College of the Hebrew University in Rehovot (1939-1940) – due to their function, intensive use and constant need for changes are very difficult to inscribe as a world heritage. The same applies to the Maimonides Hospital in San Francisco (1946-1950).

Taking this into account, according to the preliminary considerations of the “Erich Mendelsohn Initiative” historians, the “short” list of buildings selected for nomination as Erich Mendelsohn world heritage may convey: (1) the Bet Tahara ‘chapel’ in Olsztyn, Poland (1912-1913) (Fig. 6); (2) the Einstein Tower in Potsdam, Germany (1918-1924); (3) the Weichman Silk Store in Gliwice, Poland (1922-1923); (4) the Petersdorff Department Store in Wrocław, Poland (1927-1928); the Schocken Department Store in Chemnitz, Germany (1927-1930); (5) the Metal Workers’ Union Building in Berlin, Germany (1927-1930); (6) the De La War Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea, Great Britain (1933-1935); (7) the Weizmann House (Villa) in Rehovot, Israel (1934-1936); (8) the Schocken Library in Jerusalem, Israel (1934-1936); (9) the Anglo-Palestine Bank in Jerusalem, Israel (1936-1939); (10) the B’Nai Amoona Synagogue and Community Center in St. Lius, United States (1946-1950); (11) the Park Synagogue and Community Center in Cleveland, United States (1946-1952) (Fig. 7); (12) the Mount Zion Synagogue and Community Center in St. Paul, United States (1950-1954).

It is worth mentioning, that all the buildings listed above not only meet the necessary requirements, but are also still in use. Some of them fulfil the same, original function and some are successfully adapted to new purposes. The modern, flexible construction and design ensure their durability and sustainable use.



Fig. 6 The 'dome' of the Bet Tahara in Olsztyn, the first work of E. Mendelsohn, 1912-13 – expression of religious symbolism (photo Maria J. Sołtysik, 2024)



Fig. 7 The dome of the Park Synagogue in Cleveland, E. Mendelsohn, 1946-52 – the expressive skyline stresses its sacral and social position, 2009 (source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Park\\_Synagogue\\_\(Cleveland\\_Heights,\\_Ohio\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Park_Synagogue_(Cleveland_Heights,_Ohio).jpg), photo Stu- spivack)

#### 4. The ‘Property’, the title of the nomination and the chosen criteria

In view of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* the list of buildings proposed in the nomination as the legacy of Erich Mendelsohn is to be referred as ‘Property’<sup>30</sup>. In the serial nomination each of the component parts of the ‘Property’ – the buildings and complexes – shall be clearly described and indicated, their worldwide value, history, development and justification for inscription clearly presented<sup>31</sup>. The main part of the nomination dossier - the Outstanding Universal Value Statement should refer only to those buildings and complexes that are the part of the ‘Property’. Thus, in the case of Erich Mendelsohn Legacy they must not refer to the whole existing Mendelsohn’s oeuvre, but only to the buildings chosen for nomination.

The name of the ‘Property’ is practically also the title of the nomination. The title should refer to the main narrative points of the nomination, and must be relatively short and simple, to be understood by a broad public. In case of the Erich Mendelsohn’s works it should be - for example **”The Legacy of Erich Mendelsohn – expression and context in the architecture of Modern Movement”** or **”The Legacy of Erich Mendelsohn – expression and dialogue in the architecture of Modern Movement”**.

The main goal of the nomination dossier is to make clear why the ‘Property’ is of Outstanding Universal Value<sup>32</sup>. As it is stated in the *Operational Guidelines*, in case of the cultural heritage<sup>33</sup> the UNESCO World Heritage Committee considers ‘Properties’ as having Outstanding Universal Value if they meet one or more of the six following criteria: “(i) represent a masterpiece of human creative genius; (ii) exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design; (iii) bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared; (iv) be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history; (v) be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change; (vi) be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance<sup>34</sup>.”

A close analysis of the ‘Property’ in the case of Erich Mendelsohn’s legacy nomination reveals that it best meets the criterion (ii). So the crucial parts of the nomination should therefore be presented according to that.

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<sup>30</sup> *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (pp. 35-36), World Heritage Centre (WHC) 19/01, 10 July 2019.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem* (pp. 39, 101).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem* (p. 36).

<sup>33</sup> „Cultural heritage” is used here in oposite to „natural heritage” (*Ibidem* (p.19)).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem* (pp. 25-26).

## 5. The Statement of Outstanding Universal Value: a ‘Brief synthesis’ and ‘Justification for criteria’

The “Statement of Outstanding Universal Value” (OUV) is the most crucial part of the nomination for the UNESCO World Heritage List<sup>35</sup>. It should in a concise way present the main significance of the ‘Property’ and at the same time also the main narrative points of the nomination dossier. As it is addressed to a broad public, it should be easily understood and communicated<sup>36</sup>.

In view of the *Operational Guidelines* the first part of the OUV statement must consist of two points: (a) Brief synthesis and (b) Justification for criteria<sup>37</sup>. The two parts are closely related, yet stressing either the descriptive aspects of the property, or the assessment of its most significant value.

### a) *Brief synthesis*

The architectural works of Erich Mendelsohn constitute a distinguish part of the 20th century Modern Movement. His visionary works pioneered the expressive and contextual forms in Modernist architecture, tracing the way for its future development. The selected property consists of 12 buildings in Germany, Poland, Great Britain, Israel and the United States, constructed between 1912 and 1954, during the crucial phase of Modernism. This oeuvre covers a wide variety of building types, ranging from scientific and sacral edifices, department stores, office and spa complexes, banks and villas. They span three continents, following the countries where Mendelsohn established architectural practice after his forced migration from Germany in 1933.

The most significant features of all Erich Mendelsohn’s work were the expressive, dynamic, and sculptural Modernist forms, set in a dialogue with the local context. The sculptural symbolism of his architecture was especially visible in his early career - in the Bet Tahara in Olsztyn and the Einstein Tower in Potsdam. Mendelsohn’s department stores in Gliwice, Wrocław and Chemnitz, together with the Workers’ Union Building in Berlin and the De La War Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea exhibit the ‘functional dynamics’ of his architecture. They pioneered the expressive streamlined curves, which later remained popular across continents and which exposed the architect’s sensitivity to the setting and landscape.

Erich Mendelsohn’s unprecedented dialog with the local context was particularly apparent in his architecture outside Europe. The Weizmann Villa in Rehovot, the Shocken Library and the Anglo-Palestine Bank in Jerusalem responded perfectly to the different climate and topography, mating modernity with vernacular tradition. His synagogues built in the United States created the landmarks, which expressively stressed their sacral and social position.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibidem, Annex 5 (pp. 97-104).

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem (p. 39, paragraph 137 b).

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem (pp. 98, 104).

**b) Justification for criteria: criterion (ii)**

The selected architectural works of Erich Mendelsohn exhibit an unprecedented interchange of human values on a worldwide scale for over five decades of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They left a distinctive mark on the development of the Modern Movement, by introducing the new forms of expression and dialogue into the Modernist language. Mendelsohn paved the way for dynamic, sculptural and organic forms in the architecture of 20<sup>th</sup> century, and related them to the local context. Thereby the architect initiated the important changes within the International Style, drawing the expressive connection between nature and technology, local and universal.

The impact of the Mendelsohn's legacy is lasting and diverse. His Einstein Tower became the global icon of Expressionism, giving also spur for the development of organic architecture of the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The streamlined forms of his department stores launched the stylistics of Streamline Modernism of the 1930s; his vernacularly-oriented buildings in Mandatory Palestine anticipated the Critical Regionalism of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, whereas the sculptural skylines of his synagogues in the United States traced the way for the Neo-Expressionism of the 1960s.

In all his works Mendelsohn excellently capitalized the structural- and climatic-friendly potential of material and construction, ensuring their ongoing sustainable use and giving the splendid answer to the problem of „architecture and migration”. Mendelsohn's expressive and contextual attitude turned out to be visionary and offered models of architectural practice that remain relevant today.

**6. Conclusions**

The main Outstanding Universal Value of Erich Mendelsohn's legacy was introducing the new forms of expression and dialog to the Modernist architecture. His creations joined advanced modern forms with the local context and tradition, thus directing the Modernist architecture onto the new path of development. As Eric Nay put it: the architect's „(...) unique consideration of cultural tradition and an adaptability to place (...) made Mendelsohn's work more particular and more valuable as a method to see how modernity would transcend the liminality of place, but not deny context”<sup>38</sup>. Thus, these features – expression and dialog with the local context – should be stressed in the Outstanding Universal Value Statement, in the title, and in the main narrative points of the nomination dossier submitted for inscription of the Erich Mendelsohn's legacy to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

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<sup>38</sup> Nay E. (2024). *Erich Mendelsohn: Place, Identity and Exile*, [in:] *Positioning: Erich Mendelsohn and the Built Heritage of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (pp. 62-65), *ICOMOS Journals of the German Nation Committee*, no. LXXXII (2024).

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