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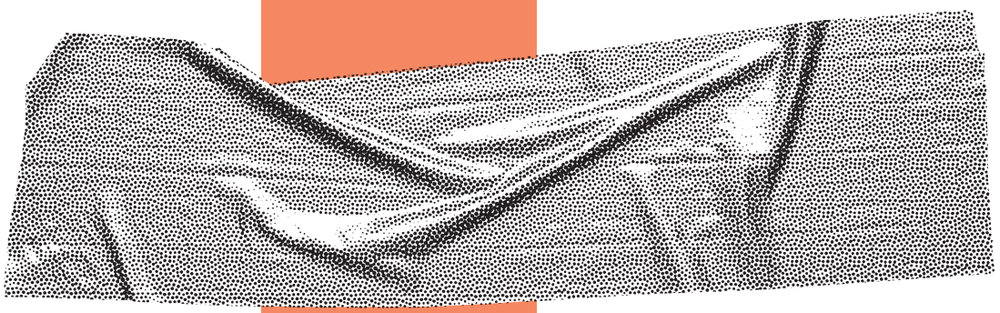

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Networks of Support

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Damian Nowak / Parastudio*

AUTOPORTRET LOGOTYPE
Piotr Chuchla

ENGLISH TRANSLATION
Natalia Raczkowska

PROOF-READING
Michael Timberlake

COLLABORATORS
Francesco Bergamo, Michał Choptiany, Paweł Jaworski, Dorota Jędruch, Aleksandra Kędziorek, Kacper Kępiński, Ewa Klekot, Piotr Winskowski, Michał Wiśniewski, Łukasz Wojciechowski, Jakub Woynarowski, Marcin Wicha, Kinga Zemła, Magdalena Zych

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"We once had to fix some large holes caused by shrapnel, but we used good, reinforced tape, the silver kind; we wrapped them up, and it was fine. As a result, the emergency situation was localised; there were no gas leaks, otherwise we could have waited there for a month", says Oleksandr Aleksieienko proudly, director of the Kramatorsk gas facilities department in conversation with Kateryna Filonova. Her article, entitled *Adapting to the war*, is based on her interviews with employees of critical infrastructure facilities in Odesa, Kharkiv, Cherkasy, Vinnytsia and Kramatorsk. An item as banal as silver duct tape has the power to restore the operation of a network that allows people to heat their homes, cook meals, and continue working.

Times of war and other crises require a lot of "silver duct tape" and even more human connections, commitment, and co-operation. Stories of evacuation and organising aid for people with disabilities in the first days of the Russian aggression prove just how much is needed. Architecture – shelters, buildings, walls in apartment blocks that absorb the shockwaves of explosions – are just as important for survival and saving lives. Filonova learnt from another interviewee that "even a month after the collapse of municipal services, there were still water supplies in the railroad shelter, so during the three days Lidiia spent there, she managed to regain the strength to dare to leave besieged Mariupol on foot".

In the "Networks of support" issue, we also take note of and analyse vacant buildings. Abandoned office towers, hotels and shopping centres offered temporary accommodation to people fleeing the front and the war. In conversation with Mateusz Włodarek, Milena Trzcińska points out the importance of void as an urban resource in emergency situations. It enables adaptation – in the sense of both domesticating the crisis and converting a building for its new purpose.

One year after the publication of the "Self-organisation" issue, we return to the topic of war in Ukraine, at the invitation of Zuzanna Mielczarek and Kacper Kępiński from the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning (NIAiU). They have included "Autoportret" in the international "Networks of Support" project. The reality of a crisis calls for the creation of new connections and the constant restoration of continuity: of infrastructure and relationships, of water supplies and railways, of the internet and, thus, lifesaving information. "Public spaces and infrastructural networks are created to fulfil everyday needs. Whether it is access to electricity, freedom of movement, or assembly, in the face of a hostile attack by another country the ability to answer these needs becomes restricted, and the community affected by the crisis must look for new solutions. Possible uses of gathering spots, transit stops, border crossings, logistics centres, storage facilities, and vacant buildings expand in times of war. In emergencies and with an influx of people and goods, spaces that have a clear purpose in our everyday lives are given new purposes to an extent that is difficult to predict", emphasise the NIAiU curators.

Independently of our project, the net metaphor was used by the curators of the Ukrainian Pavilion at this year's edition of the Venice Art Biennale. They referred to the situation of female volunteers weaving camouflage nets for the army in order to show the web of life – its knots, weaves, and flows. Both they and we tell stories of horrific times, but also ones that give hope and reassure (without glossing over reality). These stories mix enthusiasm with exhaustion and everyday hardship – with inventions born out of necessity, such as the use of silver duct tape. Have you ever seen it up close? It is reinforced with a fibre mesh.

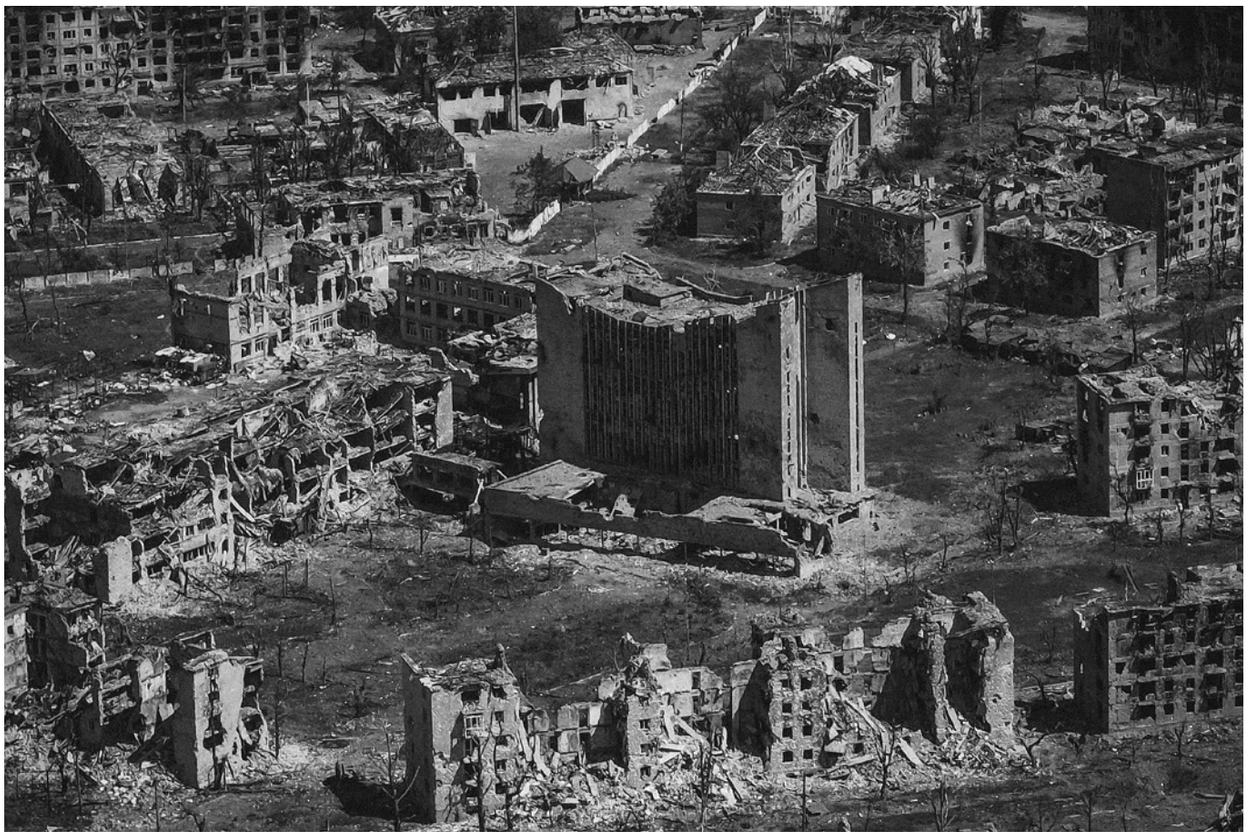
Dorota Leśniak-Rychlak

ADAPTING TO THE WAR

Infrastructure challenges and ways to overcome them during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine

TEXT
Kateryna Filonova

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has significantly affected the everyday life of cities as the infrastructure that ensures their daily functioning has been subject to serious challenges.



Bakhmut now. Top left: the Bakhmut Gas Supply and Gasification Department
Photo: official page of the 93rd separate mechanized brigade “Kholodnyi Yar”, 2023

Gas supplies, power supplies, communications, the internet, public utilities, and transportation have all been critically affected. The State Emergency Service units (SES) work under extreme conditions, trying to ensure safety and provide assistance for residents amidst the conflict. For the first time since 2014, Russian aggression has made life dangerous not only in the frontline areas – it also creates daily danger in every corner of Ukraine.

In addition, Russia holds infrastructure facilities at gunpoint – “hunting” for them was a priority in the winter of 2022–2023. “Knocking out” emergency response services, heating, electricity and water supply facilities was the second most important objective during the siege of Mariupol, after the military one.

How do these aspects interact and affect the stability and viability of the urban environment in conditions of war?

In 2023, the Center for Urban History (Lviv, Ukraine), in collaboration with the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning (Poland), began interviewing workers and managers employed in critical Ukrainian infrastructure[1]. I joined the initiative as an interviewer and researcher and have conducted interviews in cities that have lived under fire for eight years (Bakhmut, Kostiantynivka, Kramatorsk), or for which these challenges only became relevant two years ago (Vinnytsia. Kyiv, Lviv, and Drohobych). Three other colleagues recorded interviews in Kharkiv and Odesa. In total, we recorded 31 semi-structured interviews (with a duration of at least 60 minutes each), which are now archived at the Media Archive of the Center for Urban History. In this article, I present the main insights regarding factors of resilience in times of war that were taken from the interviews in four aspects: (in)security, human resources, technical support, and personal interactions with clients and recipients of services.

1 I am grateful to Dr. Sophie Lambroschini for her valuable advice on the article and her methodological consultations on interviewing the critical infrastructure workers. My gratitude for help in organizing the interviews goes to Anhelina Fesenko, journalist and press secretary of the Donetskoblgaz company, and Oksana Urbanska, journalist and press secretary of the State Emergency Service. Special thanks to Dr. Iryna Sklokina for her constant support at all stages. This work would not have been possible without her.

SECURITY

Eliminating the consequences of shelling and missile attacks, as well as working within the range of enemy artillery, is highly risky. The most emotionally difficult decision for critical infrastructure managers is sending employees to dangerous places of work.

Ihor Rusanov faced the challenges of war in 2014, when he headed the Bakhmut (then called Artemivsk) gas facilities department of Donetskoblgaz (natural gas supplier to the Donetsk oblast). He would return to his hometown of Yenakiieve on weekends; therefore, the fighting divided not only the gas networks between the two sides of the front line, but also his family. He is now, following the destruction of Bakhmut, in charge of a similar department in Kostiantynivka.

Now he lives at work, in his office in Kostiantynivka, which is shelled almost daily. An adjoining room, with its boarded-up windows and ceiling destroyed by an explosion, serves as a makeshift kitchen and storage space. Ihor says that the hardest part of his job is deciding to send employees to dangerous places, which is why he often takes part in the destruction response missions himself.

Making such decisions in frontline cities is not always related to emergencies, says his colleague Dmytro Chekansky, chief engineer of Kostiantynivka Municipal Gas Department. In addition to repairing damage, the department also carries out its regular work, such as monitoring gas consumption or detecting gas theft through unauthorized connections to the network. The inspectors are mostly women who face aggression from residents, including those who move into abandoned houses in the area: “Although there is a war going on, gas theft is not excused. Most customers think that no one [no gas inspector] will come [to check]. Now the residents are even more angry than the military, who come from the front line and

rent housing. They let the inspectors in and even sometimes help them. But the residents are exasperated, even though only 50 to 60% of them are left in the city compared to before the war”, says Dmytro.

↘ To protect employees, the gas plant has started issuing helmets and bulletproof vests to field workers, and the company has purchased an armored car. However, this does not always protect against casualties near the front line, where there is not enough time before the air-raid sirens warn of danger.

Rescuers and police working after a rocket explosion. Vinnytsia, 14 July, 2022
Photo: Press service of the State Emergency Service

T: Kateryna Filonova

Mykola Kucheruk, director of the local internet service provider, Elite-line
Photo: Mykola Kucheruk

In Kostiantynivka district, for instance, a repairman was killed while repairing a gas pipeline rupture in the village of Illinivka when enemy artillery hit the site. With the full-scale invasion, bulletproof vests and helmets have become a new piece of equipment for State Emergency Service (SES) units.

"Responding to calls related to missile strikes or drones, we head out wearing special equipment: we put a helmet on and a bulletproof vest over our protective military clothing, and we go to those sites like this", says Oleksii Dema, a fire engine driver from Vinnytsia.

Usually, the units that maintain urban infrastructure, whether they are electricity, water, gas, or other utility workers, take on the task of dealing with the aftermath of attacks after receiving authorization from the military and the State Emergency Service. They recognize that the danger in frontline cities is increasing, even for those whose jobs have always involved dealing with accidents.

Ihor Yermachenko, director of a station for the repair and maintenance of highways and their structures in Kramatorsk, says: "When we were cleaning on Marat [a house in Kramatorsk on Marat Street which was hit by an Iskander missile on February 1, 2023], they fired right next to us. We were standing in the street, and one of the rockets exploded right in front of me, and I realized that we had nowhere to run. We all hid under the trees, but trees are useless. But we were lucky – one fell in the yard, and the other on the road... And you realize that there is nowhere to run... we didn't know how many rockets there would be..."

Mykola Kucheruk, director of the local internet service provider, Elite-line, says that communications always have to be repaired with an eye to the danger of the next strike: "It's very difficult because we arrive and there is always a feeling that this very place is going to be hit again... We were lucky when the checkpoint was hit... our main line was damaged, we repaired it in the morning and left, and DTEK [Ukraine's largest private energy company, electricity producer] was fiddling with something for two more hours after we left. Two hours later, a missile hit, and a DTEK employee was injured... the Russians targeted the same spot again. And when you're doing repairs, you never know whether that place will be hit again or not." In particular, Kramatorsk Hotel was targeted at least twice at different times, and major pipeline junctions were hit.

During the work, repairmen had to stop several times because of the possibility of repeated hits: "You leave everything there, the cable is half stretched, and you don't know what to do. The guys have to temporarily tie it to something so that the cable doesn't interfere with cars."

This is why concrete shelters are now being installed in busy places in Ukrainian cities. In Kramatorsk, there are two types of shelters: those purchased by the municipal authorities, and others by the State Emergency Service. Although most of them are open to the public, the citizens are hesitant to use them because they are dirty inside and no one has the resources to keep them clean.

Despite the prolonged war, shelters have long remained a weak point in Ukrainian cities. Residents of apartment buildings began to set up their basements as shelters after the full-scale invasion but eventually stopped going down there at every siren warning, preferring the "two-wall rule" when they hear explosions or the sound of drones[2].

"There was this five-story building, and in the basement, the residents... They quickly cleaned it up, brought chairs and benches, installed lights and everyone spent air raid periods there, together, with cats, with dogs", says Oleksii Dema, a Vinnytsia resident. "When I had just arrived at my family's house, on the 26th [of February 2022], the space was already semi-equipped, and we went down there as soon as the siren sounded."

However, in educational institutions, where there are still functioning shelters, the rules are stricter, even if this was not immediately the case.

"At first, we didn't take the children anywhere, not into any basements. First of all, there were no basements prepared for that.

2 According to the two-wall rule, in the event of an explosion there should be at least two walls separating you from the source. It is therefore safe to hide in a room that is not adjacent to the façade (translator's note).

It was a blessing that there was one in this kindergarten, but it had brick walls and was damp. They just hung curtains, put benches there, and that's how they spent the first... probably six months, with the room packed to the brim, in that basement. And only after July 14 [2022, the destruction of the House of Officers concert hall and a business center in Vinnytsia by missiles] were we targeted and many people died... It was only after civilians died here that everyone started to move, as they say, to do something", says Nataliia Rolinska, a citizen of Vinnytsia.

However, the availability of infrastructure and prepared shelters increases the chances of survival in critical conditions. a Ukrainian railways employee, Lidiia Alahirova, admits that knowledge of her company's internal infrastructure helped her to act correctly during the blockade, and then to leave occupied Mariupol in the spring of 2022.

After her house burned down, she moved with her daughter to the area of the railway station, where a shelter was still functioning even though the station building was already significantly damaged: "There were a lot of people as well, and there were two shelters: a basic and a special shelter – a protective structure, which people from the city packed into. My colleagues from other districts came there because people who knew the infrastructure of the city realized that there were shelters there, and these shelters were prepared." As Lidiia points out, the railway system itself became a support network that enabled her to survive. Even a month after the collapse of municipal services, there were still water supplies in the railroad shelter, so during the three days she spent there she managed to regain the strength to dare to leave the besieged city on foot. Despite the shelling and missile attacks, the lack of transportation, and the uncertainty, Lidiia was able to remember the route as she knew where the railway rest house was located outside the blockaded city in the resort area. She also showed the way there to other refugees who had cars but did not know where to stop in the middle of the night on the road to nowhere. However, the boarding house where the Ukrainian railways company organized recreational stays for its employees turned from a shelter into a concentration camp when the occupiers arrived, and it was difficult to get out without avoiding the Russian filtration procedure. The first thing Lidiia did when she was released after a few months and got access to a phone was to call the headquarters of her company to make sure that she hadn't been fired, because she was ready to start working in another city. Now Lidiia works in Kyiv, and her family was hardly affected by the blackouts in the winter of 2022–2023 because there was always electricity at work.

PEOPLE

War leads to various demographic challenges. Migration, loss of the working-age population, and mobilization of specialists have had a serious impact on the operation of facilities responsible for the maintenance of urban infrastructure.

None of the interviewees refrained from mentioning the shortage of skilled workers. Living in dangerous conditions exacerbates the already difficult staffing situation.

"The issue of personnel was difficult in Kramatorsk even before the war", says Mykola Kucheruk. "...It takes six months to a year to train an employee so that they can independently perform the tasks we assign them. We work with very complex and difficult equipment. There were different perceptions of this situation [with the missile strikes] in the team. Some of them still have energy, while others have quit, and we had cases where one person left saying 'I'm going to visit my relatives for half a day', and that's it. The person disappears, and you realize that they just couldn't take it anymore." At the same time, Mykola is not able to formally dismiss such employees until the end of martial law.

Before the full-scale invasion, the distribution and control service of the Kostiantynivka gas department had 50 employees. Now 25 people work there. Most of these are people who were recruited over the past year. In the first days after the invasion, six remained as the rest had evacuated or left the country, says Dmytro Chekanskyi. At the Kramatorsk road maintenance station, the number of employees decreased by two and a half times after the invasion.

"When I came here in May [20]22, the company employed 242 people on a full-time basis, according to the staffing plan. After the war started, with the missile hits and evacuation, 96 people remained", says Serhii Yermachenko.

The city administration invited Serhii to take over the management of the company when the previous director left. Before the invasion, Serhii worked as the director of a regional branch of an alcohol distributor, so he admits that he struggled to understand the principles of a municipal enterprise after working in the commercial sector as they are not always governed by financial expediency. However, he managed to overcome the staffing crisis in the company by recruiting some of his former colleagues who had lost their jobs due to the ban on alcohol trade in the region.

Another reason for the shortage of personnel, he adds, is the fact that military registration is required for official employment, and a significant number of specialists in the so-called "male" professions are afraid of mobilization, even if their specialization provides exemption from military service.

Perhaps this is why the staff shortages in the public utility sector have not improved at all in cities such as Vinnytsia, where the population has grown by 12% since the beginning of the invasion, according to Serhii Borzov, head of the Vinnytsia oblast military administration[3]. Nataliia Rolinska, deputy chief power engineer of Vinnytsia Vodokanal (the water utility of the Vinnytsia oblast), answers the question regarding the most difficult thing about her work in 2022–2023:

"I think the hardest part is only just beginning. There is a massive shortage of people

T: Kateryna Filonova

A rocket that fell near the hotel damaged the water supply, electricity, and fiber optic networks
Photo: Mykola Kucheruk

now, there is no one to work. Even though we have filled as many positions as possible, we only have women and seniors left, and we are quickly running out of seniors as well. And we are now starting to intensely feel the shortage of specialists and staff. Initially, when there were a lot of internally displaced persons and a wave of people came… people from Kherson came to work for us, there were also people from Severodonetsk, but I'm not sure now. There is no one at all, there are no people from the employment center, really, no one."

> The shortage of staff means that the existing employees work many more hours – they work on weekends or take extra shifts. During intense shelling, another problem arises: people are physically unable to get to work or home.

"There is no transportation, the roads are blocked by checkpoints, the electric trains do not run, and you cannot drive through this. How are you supposed to get anywhere? We stayed as long as we could. I have a lot of friends from the suburbs, which means an hour and a half walk for them, so it's impossible to do it every time, just like in my case. Three hours on foot and two checkpoints along the way. You walk and think about what you're going to catch: a rifle butt or a bullet? To go or not to go?" says Pavlo, a locksmith at Kharkiv Heating Networks.

In Kramatorsk and Kharkiv, it has become commonplace for even top managers to take up tools: "When there is a shortage, the superiors get involved, change their clothes, pick up the wrenches and go." And these are not isolated cases. So, there's nothing [humiliating] here, as one boss once said, it's not shameful to pick up the wrenches; it's shameful to stand by and watch someone toiling."

Even before the full-scale invasion, the work of the emergency services had been switched to an 'enhanced' mode. In Vinnytsia, for example, rescuers were on duty every other day (instead of every three days) or even for several days in a row; in Odesa, even the employees who were not involved in daily tasks were actually on duty all the time:

"We practically lived at work, probably went home to change clothes, wash and shower, because we all wear uniforms to work, but sometimes we can go about in civilian clothes. That is, if there is no response required, if you're not working at that moment, you don't need to wear your uniform. Back then, for more than three months, we forgot what civilian clothes were; we were constantly in our uniforms and working, working almost around the clock because the missile strikes started from day one", says Maryna Martynenko, head of the SES department in Odesa.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

In contrast to human resources, technical support for infrastructure services in Ukraine has improved significantly over the past two years.

"We are well-equipped now and we get the opportunity to learn; we get new machines. We want this to continue because we all hope that the war will end soon, but we also want the attention on us to not end with the war", says Oleksii Dema, a driver for a Vinnytsia fire brigade.

It is not only the rescuers who are better provided for, as the attention paid to them is understandable in the war conditions. Other critical enterprises – water and energy

3 Anastasia Mohylyvets, *Naselennia Vinnychchyny zbilshylos*, Vinnytsia.info, 22.06.2023, https://vinnitsa.info/article/naselennya-vinnychchyny-zbilshylos-na-10-z-pochatku-povnomasshtabnoyi-viyny (accessed: 28.06.2024).

suppliers, road construction companies, and housing associations – are also receiving the necessary reagents and materials as humanitarian aid.

The public utility companies in Kramatorsk and Kharkiv have purchased new specialized equipment.

"We are now going to buy another excavator. When something happens, everyone becomes busy, which means that all the municipal equipment is working: the water and heating workers are doing their jobs, which means we lack the equipment we need. That's why (...) we were allocated money this year and we bought a crane, an excavator, and another loader... When we were repairing the damage at Ria Pizza [the consequences of Russian missiles hitting the restaurant in Kramatorsk on June 27, 2023 – ed.], we were only able to get to the last bodies thanks to our new loader because nobody, nothing, could break this concrete, except for this Bobcat of ours – we suspended it from a crane, and it broke this concrete slab", says Ihor Yermachenko.

Incidentally, the non-standard use of the simplest tools also helps in critical situations. Oleksandr Aleksieienko, director of the Kramatorsk gas facilities department, says that when the city is shelled with cluster munitions, rescuers have to clean up the area for a long time, which delays repair work. In cases like these, the usual duct tape comes in handy: "Duct tape is a very good material, it stops all leakage. We once had to fix some large holes caused by shrapnel, but we used a good, reinforced tape, the silver kind — we wrapped it up and it was fine. As a result, the emergency situation is localized; there are no gas leaks, otherwise we could wait there for a month."

Even the services that are not funded by the state and local budgets also need to be a few steps ahead. For example, the internet providers in Kramatorsk were already confronted with the need for more stable communication in 2014, as information is a basic need in critical conditions.

The war has accelerated the introduction of technologies in the city that allow internet

Replacement of gas pipes
Photo: Angelina Fesenko

Rescuers in Vinnytsia after extinguishing a fire on 14 July, 2022
Photo: Press service of the State Emergency Service

T: Kateryna Filonova

distribution even when there is no electricity in households. The junctions from which the fiber-optic lines run to each customer are powered by diesel generators and powerful batteries, and this system is constantly being improved: “This year [2023] we have prepared a lot, we have drawn many conclusions from last autumn and winter; we have changed the network topology, we have reduced the number of active junctions and consolidated them. We have delivered a fairly large batch of powerful batteries with new inverters that will allow us to keep it running on batteries; before that, we ordered and now have three diesel generators with automatic start function at three junctions. That is, last year we were doing stupid work: driving around, replacing dead batteries, installing generators, and refueling them; it takes a lot of manpower and a lot of effort, and we were exhausted. We hope that this year, even if the situation is the same, we will be able to deal with it more easily”, says Mykola Kucheruk.

Currently, Kramatorsk’s internet providers have developed several scenarios for what to do in the event of shells hitting critical junctions. They have additional sets of fully configured equipment that can be used as replacement within 24 hours of a direct hit, and they have installed backup lines.

“We used to have a rule that two independent lines with different routes should enter each junction, and now it’s not just different routes, we need them to not intersect anywhere. If we have to dig somewhere, we do it, we go into detail and, fortunately, it has been paying off”, says Mykola Kucheruk.

However, it would be wrong to believe that everything looks so optimistic: the financial situation of Kramatorsk internet service providers is not exactly good. After the invasion, the number of customers dropped by two-thirds, then a factor of five.

Yurii Trembach, director of the Kramatorsk-based Satellite Service provider, admits that he had planned to close the company in the summer of 2022, but the success of the military operation in Kharkiv and the liberation of Izium by Ukrainian troops changed the situation, and now the city has 50% of its pre-invasion customers, according to local internet providers. The same figure – 50–60% of customers compared to 2021 – is cited by gas workers, service companies, and the Kramatorsk military administration[4]. Mykola Kucheruk adds that this figure is unstable as every fluctuation on the front line is reflected in the number of connections.

Due to the decline in the number of customers and instability, the providers had to abandon promotional offers and revise tariffs. This is causing disappointment among customers, as people have become accustomed to seeing the “connection for just one hryvnia” promotional discounts as the norm, even though it costs the company an average of 1.5 thousand hryvnias to connect a new customer.

“During the full-scale invasion, Elite-Line has also significantly expanded its work with corporate clients and budget-funded entities. Additionally, in critical conditions, local providers ‘intercept’ customers of large national companies that are unable to promptly respond to accidents and outages.

“We have obtained a certificate for comprehensive information security system to work

4 Oleksii Ladyka, *Stalo vidomo, skilky meshkantsiv povernulosia do Kramatorska*, Kramatorsk. Post, 28.12.2023, https://www.kramatorskpost.com/stalo-vidomo-skilki-meskanciv-povernulosya-do-kramatorska-z-evakuaciyi_86073 (accesseed: 28.06.2024).

The loader was attached to a crane
Photo: Press service of Kramatorsk City Council

with budget-funded institutions. We have been working with them since before the war, without fear of the responsibility and requirements. Now, the war has shown that few providers are willing to take these measures. (...) Many companies and the military were also left alone after February 24. They were connected to Kyiv-based backbone providers, which stopped working because the channels were down and there was no one from their offices here.

→ Gas supply restoration in Kostiantynivka
Photo: press service of Donetskoblgaz

↘ So, we just picked people up, we provided free internet to many people so that they could be connected at that moment. And somehow we are now the biggest provider serving public institutions in Kramatorsk, both because of this war and because we are trying to make sure that everything works well."

▩ The internet connection in Kramatorsk being repaired as soon as possible
Photo: Mykola Kucheruk

INTERACTIONS WITH CUSTOMERS

Work in critical infrastructure would not be complete without interactions on an individual level. During the interviews, we asked our respondents to assess how their relationships with customers, city authorities, and business partners, as well as within the team, have changed since the full-scale invasion.

The rescuers clearly see positive changes in the public's attitude towards their work. According to Vadym Hrom, a rescuer from the Vinnytsia fire department, these are not just words of gratitude. The unit's statistics show that situations requiring emergency intervention have become more difficult, but the number of calls has decreased as if people have not only stopped bothering the rescuers with trivial matters but have also become more attentive in dealing with electrical appliances or stoves, which were the main causes of fires.

Maryna Martynenko, who had the opportunity to visit Kherson after its liberation, says that the rescuers were greeted with joy, in particular because they represented the return of the Ukrainian government to the de-occupied territories: "People were crying and crying, yes, men were crying, children were crying, women were running with flags and telling how they had been hiding these flags, how they had been burying them, but people had been waiting."

Other services have either not noticed any particular changes or have noted that people have become more irritable and unwilling to put up with the everyday difficulties that arise from the effects of shelling or missile strikes.

"People are on edge because many have lost their jobs", says the head of a heating company, who wishes to remain anonymous. "Of all the prices of [utility] services... ours is the highest. People are exhausted, both morally and psychologically, and they expect quality services, even if they don't pay for them."

Public opinion about Donetskoblgaz has not improved either. Although the repairmen hear words of gratitude after the gas supply to their villages has been restored, the attitude towards the inspectors is quite the opposite, and not everyone understands why they have to pay for the gas supply services. Those customers who have left their homes continue to receive bills for gas transportation and do not understand why they have to pay for a service they do not use. They can only refuse it by initiating the termination of their

T: Kateryna Filonova

contract with the network operator, which is not easy when they are in evacuation." It happens that customers demand that the service be restored during an air raid, internet providers say.

"The mobile internet usually does not work. During shelling back in 2014, the network was constantly overloaded, the mobile network rarely worked, and the internet did not work at all. It was the same this year and last year. So, the internet has become such a crucial service during the war, allowing people to communicate with their relatives, find out information, etc. Unfortunately, most people don't understand [the process]. a customer calls and says: 'I don't have internet.' 'That's because a missile hit your house!' 'That was the sixth entrance, but I live on the other side of the building, everything is intact here.' So, the missile hits near him and he says, 'When are you coming to fix it?' We go like, well, let's see how quickly the air raid ends", says Mykola Kucheruk.

There have even been direct threats. Mykola admits that during the hot phase of hostilities some customers promised to make every effort to "send" the provider's employees "to Bakhmut" (i.e., to one of the hottest sections of the frontline) if the internet was not repaired within an hour.

People who fled their cities because of the war tend to positively assess the providers' work. "I hear kind words of gratitude from people who had left the city and experienced staying in other cities and other countries", says the director of the Kramatorsk-based Satellite Service company. "They come to us and say: 'Oh, man, we miss you, everything is great here, in Chernivtsi, but we miss your internet here. The internet is bad, but yours was great." I hear this quite often. I also hear about the internet abroad – that it is expensive and not always of such high quality, not so reliable. Well, actually, reliability is something we've been working on... In general, the situation with the internet in Ukraine is often better than in other countries because the state has ignored and not regulated this area for a long time. And since the internet is more or less the same for everyone, competition arises when it comes to the quality of service."

In 2016, the Ukrainian state regulator has obliged providers to restrict access to resources from Russia and the occupied territories. This is a major marketing challenge, admits Svitlana Korableva, who worked for a Mariupol-based provider until March 2022:

"...When we conducted a survey 'What would you like to change about your internet or TV provider,' the largest number of requests was to add Russian channels and Russian television. But we didn't go into the gray area – there were providers who did that and taught their customers how to get around these restrictions. We didn't do that, we provided the internet as it should be, and everything else was your problem – you could either change your provider or stop watching Russian channels, stop caring about them. (...) As a marketing manager, I have to meet the needs of the customer, the user, the person who pays us money. But the position of our higher-ups and my position is that we do not work with such clients, they are not ours."

"Some of my colleagues strongly opposed it from the very beginning, because the internet is a free information environment, and rightfully so..." says Yurii Trembach. "I recognize the benefits of certain blocking, such as the National Council for Security and Defense's (NSDC) decision of [20]17. I think it was the very first such move – to block VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, and Yandex. (...) Since these are not only websites but an infrastructure environment consisting of websites, social networks, messengers, some kind of authorization tools, and financial instruments for transferring funds, so it's a kind of, I don't even know what to call it... it's an infrastructure. And when one element is blocked, (...) it starts to break down as a whole, and that can't be fixed with an anonymizer or a VPN because it will break down in a thousand different places, so people started to just remove this integration... and, considering that this is a network controlled by the Russian special services, it's a good thing, actually. So, we

just tore it out, and people integrated into other… transferred to some global alternatives. But blocking websites is just nonsense", says Yurii Trembach.

As for interaction between infrastructure services and local authorities, its effectiveness varies between municipalities. In some municipalities, not all utility workers have passes that allow them to work during curfews, while in others every employee involved in emergency repairs is provided with a pass. However, none of the interviewees complain about this. They say that during the full-scale invasion, the protocol of interaction with the military administrations has been working almost flawlessly. The military and emergency services work first, followed by road builders, communications, and energy technicians.

Sometimes, local administrations assign unusual tasks to utility companies. In the fall of 2022, for example, a road maintenance company supplied residents of Kramatorsk with firewood. Now it receives contracts not only for inner-block road repairs, but also for planting trees, cleaning rivers, and planning military burial sites.

"It's because we were afraid that we would be left without heating last year", says Ihor Yermachenko, director of the Kramatorsk road maintenance station. "So, we had to sign contracts, get the wood, cut it, and deliver it to the inhabitants. It was almost 5 thousand cubic meters of wood from other parts of Ukraine. We picked it up from the railway station with help from local forestry enterprises. It was quite a race… It was free of charge for the residents. The first program was partially funded by the Ukrainian government, with some help from the local budget. So, the hardest task was to find the firewood first since we needed a large amount. Then we had to bring the logs here, unload them, saw them, and deliver two cubic meters per address, and there were more than 2 thousand addresses."

The full-scale war has also made cooperation with partner organizations and the usual logistics of the supply companies more difficult.

"There is this factory in Zaporizhzhia that we used to order certain equipment from", says Nataliia Rolinska. "Now, during the war, shortly after the 24th, we ordered three of these products from them.

> ↘ So, we call them to ask, 'How are you?' They say, 'Oh, you know, we are a little behind the schedule because we had an air raid at night. All the windows were blown out of our factory. Your equipment was not damaged, everything is intact, but there will be a slight delay.'

Or we hear, 'Oh, you know, our adjuster, who is responsible for setting up this device, was mobilized, and there are no people left to finish this work. We do have a retired specialist here, and if we can find him, he will finish the job for you.'"

Reorientation to other suppliers or logistics chains is nothing unusual for infrastructure companies. This happened to varying degrees between 2014 and 2020, as market links with Russia, Belarus, Crimea, and Donbas diminished. The biggest test since the full-scale invasion was the Russian seizure of Soledar, as salt is used in large volumes in both road maintenance (to improve friction in icy conditions) and heating systems.

"In 2022, it was hard to buy salt. So, we imported it from abroad, transported it. And the price was different, and it was physically not available at any price", says the head of the heating company.

The challenges in dealing with partner organizations and government regulatory authorities have intensified. For example, the Supreme Council of Ukraine has imposed a moratorium on tariffs for gas, heat, and hot water. At the same time, the electricity tariff for companies has risen more than two and a half times since the full-scale invasion. This is a significant element in the pricing structure of other utilities. Despite the increase in electricity prices, Vinnytsia Vodokanal has been unable to get a new tariff approved by the state regulator (the National Commission for State Regulation of Energy and Public Utilities) for several years. As electricity costs account for more than 50% of the company's tariff, this situation is driving the company further into the trap of unprofitability.

Under these circumstances, raising the salaries of infrastructure employees is out of the question. All respondents noted that their earnings had dropped significantly as there is no question of bonuses or allowances in times of war.

"I also think that you cannot exploit people's enthusiasm forever", Nataliia Rolinska reflects, "so why not find another system to keep us afloat? I mean, where are people going to get the money from to pay for all this? Businesses can't bear these taxes in the long run either; they can't survive in this situation."

CHALLENGES

The war has exacerbated the problems that infrastructure companies already had before the full-scale invasion or that were typical of the post-Soviet utilities sector in general: skilled labor shortages and low salaries, as well as dilapidated networks in some sectors, such as water or housing utilities. Due to the migration and mobilization of specialists, staffing problems have become even more acute. This applies in particular to skilled workers such as fitters, plumbers,

T: Kateryna Filonova

and mechanics. Solutions such as hiring senior citizens to fill the positions or additional shifts for existing employees cannot be sustainable, but municipal companies have no vision of how to solve this problem in the future.

> ↘ Financial losses, which have long been an ongoing issue for public utilities, have also increased as the population's debt for services has risen significantly due to migration and lower incomes, while ensuring networks remain functional is essential, even amidst a decrease in consumers.

Private companies that were previously unaffected by defaults, such as local internet service providers, have also seen a significant drop in income. The way out for them was to attract budget-funded entities, which are obliged by the state to provide visitors with high-quality and secure internet, and to "intercept" customers of national operators, for whom it was difficult and unprofitable to provide services in regions where networks are most often damaged.

The risks for specialists working in emergency response are increasing. In addition to the dangers inherent to their profession, there is also rocket and artillery fire. Attacks on infrastructure also affect the number of emergencies indirectly. For example, any short-term shutdown of a main water supply system, even for a short time due to a power outage, can result in ruptures in worn-out areas.

Although the experts acknowledged logistical challenges arising from the loss of partners or suppliers or as a result of force majeure, they didn't consider them to be critical. As a rule, all infrastructure companies have a sufficient stock of spare parts and backup equipment to be able to respond to problematic situations and immediately solve logistics issues. Infrastructure companies' technical equipment is also provided thanks to support from Ukrainian partners. There are programs that help solve problems with tools and equipment, whether in the form of humanitarian aid or grants for modernization. Representatives of the State Emergency Service note a significant improvement in material and technical conditions, and internet providers are beginning to use the latest technologies in this area as the reliability of information channels is becoming a key to survival during the war.

As far as interaction with clients is concerned, only emergency service workers note a clear increase in the prestige of their profession. Representatives of other services feel that their efforts are undervalued, except when it comes to restoring services that people have not had for several months. They explain this by the general nervousness of the population and the drop in income. Even people suffering from shelling or air strikes are not willing to put up with inconveniences and a decrease in the quality of public services.

So, the war has not only exacerbated the existing problems of public utilities, it has also brought new challenges. If the current solutions cannot be sustainable, they must look for innovative strategies to overcome staffing, financial, and logistical difficulties. Achieving stability and progress in the utilities sector in the midst of war requires both individual determination and collective support from the state and the community. Only through this joint effort can we ensure the sustainable development of the sector.

ITERVIEWED BY:

KATERYNA FILONOVA, OLHA MAHAZYNSKA, YAROSLAV SHKABURA

INTERVIEWEES:

IHOR RUSANOV
interviewed on October 12, 2023, in Kostiantynivka

DMYTRO CHEKANSKY
interviewed on October 12, 2023, in Kostiantynivka

OLEKSII DEMA
interviewed on December 8, 2023, in Vinnytsia

IHOR YERMACHENKO
interviewed on October 13, 2023, in Kramatorsk

MYKOLA KUCHERUK
interviewed on October 13, 2023, in Kramatorsk

NATALIIA ROLINSKA
interviewed on November 20, 2023, in Vinnytsia

LIDIIA ALAHIROVA
interviewed on November 22, 2023, in Kyiv

PAVLO (anonymized)
interviewed on November 25, 2023, in Kharkiv

OLEKSANDR ALEKSIEIENKO
interviewed on October 12, 2023, in Kramatorsk

YURII TREMBACH
interviewed on October 10, 2023, in Lviv

VADYM HROM
interviewed on December 08, 2023, in Vinnytsia

MARYNA MARTYNENKO
interviewed on December 12, 2023, in Odesa

SVITLANA KORABLEVA
interviewed on November 18, 2023, in Cherkasy (online)

HEAD OF A HEATING COMPANY (anonymized)
interviewed on December 19, 2023, in Odesa

HOW TO TURN AN OFFICE INTO A HOME?

▩ Children's playroom in Ilmet – one of the office buildings that property developers shared with the Warsaw authorities as part of the #Property4Ukraine initiative
Photo: Łukasz Stępnik

↗ Ilmet office building in Warsaw
Photo: Łukasz Stępnik

→ Plan of the 2nd floor of the Ilmet office building – spaces adapted for Ukrainian refugees. Documentation prepared by Studio Widoki for the Ambulatorium exhibition during DoFA 2022

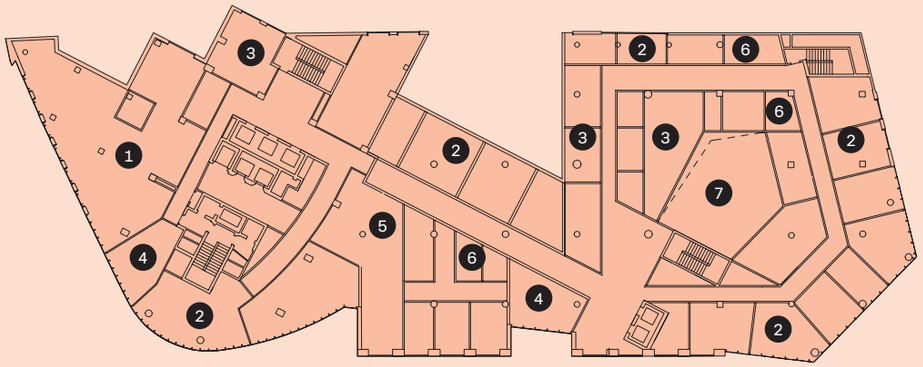
Mateusz Włodarek

IN CONVERSATION WITH **Milena Trzcińska** AND **Łukasz Stępnik**

OF STUDIO WIDOKI

1 canteen
2 rooms
3 storage rooms
4 administration
5 childrens' room
6 toilets
7 4-storey atrium

2ND FLOOR



MATEUSZ WŁODAREK:

How did you become interested in transforming office buildings into housing for Ukrainian refugees?

MILENA TRZCIŃSKA:

Almost by accident. Barbara Nawrocka and Dominika Wilczyńska from Miastopracownia organised the 2022 edition of the Dolnośląski Festiwal Architektury (Lower-Silesian Architecture Festival, DOFA) in Wrocław and invited us to take part. We formed a team with Anastasiyia Ponomaryova, an architect from the CO-HATY initiative who specialises in adapting buildings to the needs of internally displaced persons in Ukraine. Initially, the curators asked us to design a readaptation of a building in Wrocław and show our proposal at the *Ambulatorium* exhibition during DOFA. Instead, we decided to examine what other architects had done. Together with Anastasyia, we analysed buildings that had been converted for residential purposes and compared Ukrainian and Polish strategies in dealing with such projects. Anastasyia has led very complex initiatives in Ukraine, transforming buildings that were designated as long-term accommodation. In these cases, the aim was to build strong, empowered communities. In Poland, these processes were often rushed and some buildings had to be remodelled within three days.

ŁUKASZ STĘPNIK:

It is important to mention that none of us had previously participated in a building readaptation project. We work at Warsaw University of Technology and we are practising architects and researchers, so we naturally wondered what such a situation could tell us about the city and the design process – how it can sensitise us and deepen our working methodology outside the context of the crisis. My intuition tells me that the emergence of new ideas is accelerated in these historic moments of transition. It might come off as cynical, but we wanted to observe some adaptation processes from a distance and see whether they can influence how we design our cities and buildings.

MW: **What kind of buildings did you choose? What was their past and why did their function change?**

ŁS: We analysed four buildings in Warsaw. a few property developer companies shared their spaces with the city as part of the #Property4Ukraine initiative a few weeks after the full-scale invasion. Three of them, Ilmet, Warta Tower and Atrium International,

were located close to each other in the centre of Warsaw. They were built at the turn of the century and epitomised this era of systemic transformation. In their time, they were regarded as blueprints for contemporary office architecture. The fourth building, the Mars office tower, had a different history. It was built in the Służewiec Przemysłowy district during the communist era and was remodelled for office use in the mid-1990s by JEMS Architekci studio.

All these buildings had their own character and aesthetic expression; each told a different story of the systemic transformation, but together they formed a coherent picture of the city in the 1990s. They reflected the contemporary understanding of prestige and modernity. After their heyday, they were earmarked either for modernisation or to be replaced by larger and taller buildings.

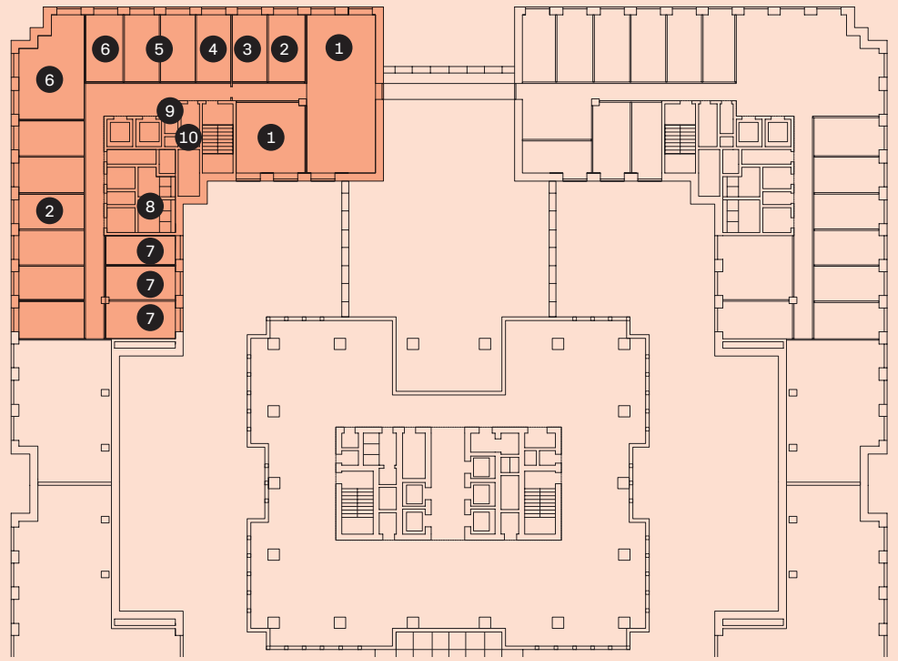
It is important to note that all these buildings were owned by private investors, not the public sector. The relationship between private and public, as well as the way the city carries out its policy, are very interesting in this situation. The local government made various attempts to persuade property owners to share their resources. Thus, partly through the initiative of the developers and partly through the encouragement of the city, it was possible to establish an atypical model of public-private partnership and open four large refugee accommodation centres.

MW: **Thanks to private resources, the city was able to respond more efficiently to the crisis. Why did private investors decide to rent out their buildings?**

MT: Developers do not operate in a vacuum: they build in cities that fall under the jurisdiction of local governments, taking advantage of the local social and technical infrastructure, public spaces, etc. They are one piece of a complex puzzle. They often have to negotiate with local officials and adapt their plans accordingly. Therefore, it is important that they get along well with the city representatives. However, I think that their involvement in this case was not the result of calculations as many people felt the need to help in some way. It all happened in the blink of an eye. We need to remember that this momentary suspension and blurring of the line between private and public is possible.

MW: **How were the office buildings transformed into homes?**

MT: All the transformations were rushed, taking between three and six days, so the people involved relied on what they found in the building. Interventions were kept to an absolute minimum: adding bathrooms, arranging kitchens and dining spaces. Fortunately, office buildings of the old type had separate offices instead of an open plan, so rooms for one large family or two, sometimes three, could be easily arranged. The separate offices helped fulfil the new occupants' need for privacy. They were different people, mostly



WARTA TOWER
1ST FLOOR

0 5 10m

1 canteens for 50 and 30 people
2 storage
3 doctor's room
4 office room
5 study room
6 computer rooms
7 isolation rooms
8 toilets
9 storage
10 kichenette

▩ Plan of the 1st floor of the Warta office building – spaces adapted for Ukrainian refugees
Drawing: Studio Widoki for DoFA 2022

↓ Warta office building in Warsaw
Photo: Łukasz Stępnik

strangers, so it was obvious that not all of them wanted to live together and support each other.

The centres in Mars and Warta were organised similarly to large hotels. Bartosz Domański and his team quickly analysed some typical hotel plans and used them to draft the functional layout of the Mars office building. They applied a clear structure with residential and service zones (technical and storage rooms, medical facilities). The zones were separate from one another and assigned to specific floors, which made it easier to control movement and restrict access to certain spaces. During our interviews, we learnt that unrestricted movement was a source of many problems and hindered daily operation in buildings arranged without clear functional zoning.

ŁS: Especially in Ilmet. The shape and geometry make its layout irregular and confusing. After the adaptation, the residents found it difficult to find their way around.

MW: **What was the functional programme of these buildings after readaptation? What types of spaces were provided?**

ŁS: Storage was one of the most important functions, right after the living quarters. It also placed a significant load on the floor slabs; in Służewiec, supplies for the refugees had to be stored outside the building. Each of the projects had spaces that fulfilled an additional function: canteens and dining rooms for communal meals (eating in the rooms was forbidden for hygienic reasons), doctors' and psychologists' offices, playrooms for children, study rooms, free shops (shops with free clothes). Some of the shelters also offered other services, such as a hairdressing salon.

MT: There were also rooms with an undefined purpose, which were adapted according to the needs and ideas of the residents.

ŁS: The functional programme also included administrative offices and rooms for people with special needs. In Mars, there was a floor of small hotel rooms with private bathrooms (left behind by a previous tenant) that was designated for mothers with newborns or children on the autism spectrum. There were also spaces typical of the architecture of the time, such as multi-storey atriums. The inner courtyard of Ilmet served as a sports court and meeting space.

MT: The characteristic central part of Atrium (one of these four office buildings) was used for celebrations. The residents set up a bouncy castle for Children's Day and watched Eurovision there. This building is a prime example of how spaces with unique architectural features and large capacity can also serve important social functions.

MW: **Which architectural features make adaptation easy? Which ones hinder it?**

ŁS: Most of the buildings we analysed had a closed floor plan with private offices on a modular grid, as was typical of the architecture of the 1990s and 2000s but is difficult to find today. It allowed the existing rooms to be easily adapted into bedrooms for several people without the need to set up partition walls. The most common problem was the bay width, which was a direct result of the buildings' size. Hotel and residential buildings are much narrower compared to offices, where bays can be up to 20 metres wide. This leaves large areas of the interior without direct sunlight. These spaces are often used as communication shafts or conference rooms which do not require natural lighting. During the adaptation process, the architects need to find a purpose for these vast, dark spaces. They were mostly used for additional service functions, but due to high demand they were sometimes converted into windowless bedrooms.

The residents complained about the fixed windows, the lack of outdoor areas, balconies, loggias, and natural ventilation, as well as the inefficient installations. The capacity of the electrical installation was far too low, and the ventilation systems often stopped working as they were designed for buildings with a different purpose.

MT: Mars had operable windows, but they had to be locked after someone tried to jump.

ŁS: Yes, in this one case the situation was reversed. Otherwise, most of our interviewees were bothered by the fixed windows. They needed contact with the outside world, but also the airflow could have helped ease the strain on the mechanical ventilation system.

MW: **How was this issue resolved?**

ŁS: In Ilmet, for example, the façade was perforated using primitive methods: holes were drilled in the external walls in order to let the air inside. The centralised ventilation systems are designed for an open-plan office and stopped working when many people gathered in the small, enclosed spaces. The buildings were unfit in terms of both infrastructure and installations. Most of the problems were caused by the overloaded electrical installation and the insufficient number of bathrooms.

MT: In some cases, the use of appliances such as hair driers and refrigerators was prohibited in the rooms, being allowed only in specially designated areas.

ŁS: The building structure delayed the response to these issues. The concrete slabs and the rigid division into installation shafts and serviced spaces made it impossible to efficiently add more installations and safely lay cables.

MW: **What methods were used to temper the cold and formal office architecture and make it more homely?**

MT: The rooms were quite austere. They were equipped with a mix of office furniture, camp beds, and what

the residents themselves provided. In the beginning, it was mostly camp beds donated by local scout groups; however, as time passed, the city began to provide mattresses, but that made matters worse as residents were previously able to store their belongings under their beds; not everyone had a cupboard.

The rooms in Mars had glass doors and people covered them with anything they could find, such as bed sheets. This was uncomfortable and ineffective, but it offered a little privacy. a kind of intimacy and individuality manifested itself in inconspicuous spaces that were irregularly shaped and had a semi-circular plan or other distinguishing features. They made it easier for residents to identify with a particular place. Ilmet had larger rooms that accommodated six to eight strangers, so they often separated their private spaces with room dividers and hung clothes or arranged their personal belongings in such a way as to demarcate their individual areas.

ŁS: The design imagination of the 1990s resulted in places that, to a certain extent, enabled personalisation and identification with the space. This would certainly be more difficult in the generic spaces of today's office buildings.

MW: **How do the adaptations in your research differ from those we know from the time of the pandemic?**

ŁS: What stood out the most was the approach to function. Typically, large-scale buildings are preferred in crisis response situations: sports halls, stadiums and other places that can efficiently accommodate as many people as possible. However, these spaces are unsuitable for prolonged accommodation from the point of view of environmental psychology, spatial perception, or simply for comfort and safety. Subdividing such spaces with paper, fabric, or prefabricated partitions results only in a substitute for privacy and comfort.

MW: **How can such adaptation of space be used for collective learning and urban prototyping in the case of future crises?**

ŁS: Rushed adaptations are a trial run for the changes that our cities will face and for the way buildings will be designed in the future. An analysis of these processes can give us concrete proposals regarding the application of some structural systems, the most flexible bay widths, and the best façade designs for buildings that could easily be converted into not only accommodation centres but also flats and for other functions. According to a report by Statistics Poland from 2022, up to 12% of Poland's housing stock is unused, so there is great potential. The last audit of the Supreme Audit Office regarding vacant apartments in Warsaw revealed 81.2 thousand municipal flats, of which 9.6 thousand were empty at the end of 2022. However, only 2.8 thousand of those were habitable, while the rest were disqualified due to poor technical condition. The authors of the audit pointed out the lack of surveys of vacant housing stock. We believe that these resources should be adapted in order to ensure quick response to emergencies. So far, they remain unutilised due to economic, structural, and legal obstacles.

MT: We touched on the notion of void, which I find very interesting. It is widely believed that a place that is empty is underutilised and should therefore be used. The influx of refugees from Ukraine has shown that vacant spaces give us the flexibility to act in times of crisis when we suddenly need to house large numbers of people. Vacant spaces serve a purpose in our cities.

ŁS: Cities should adopt a strategy for the management of vacant housing stock. We believe that some of it should remain empty as a safety buffer for emergencies.

MW: **Which of the elements we discussed can be applied to everyday design practice?**

ŁS: The function of a building is not permanent: it changes at least a few times during its life cycle. The current situation suggests design methods that are universal enough to allow our built structures to absorb the dynamics of transition. The conclusions for everyday design practice are obvious on the one hand, but ambiguous on the other.

First of all, we have become dependent on technical infrastructure. In the case of office buildings, it produces airtight, mechanically serviced boxes that separate people from the outside world. Inside, it creates an unhealthy ecosystem that is also ineffective when faced with the need for readaptation. Installation guidelines determine what can be changed and to what extent. Secondly, we need to consider the universality of buildings in terms of their shapes and proportions. The application of neoliberal logic to the creation of our built environment results in progressively larger buildings with wider and darker bays, making them more difficult adapt to the requirements of other functional programmes. We need buildings that can be naturally lit and ventilated, regardless of their original purpose.

We have also observed structural elements and modular grids. The structural elements should be dimensioned in such a way that would allow for further subdivision into rooms of a reasonable size. It is difficult to add new elements and installation shafts or to make openings in monolithic concrete structures. This limits opportunities for readaptation and slows down the process. We should therefore prioritise hybrid structural systems, e.g., a mixture of concrete slabs and wooden elements that can be easily dismantled without major investment or construction machinery. If a quick modification is required, you can simply remove a piece of a slab and connect two floors together or lay out the necessary installations. These ideas are currently being developed in many projects around the world due to the climate crisis.

MW: **What elements of adaptability have you proposed in your universal building prototype?**

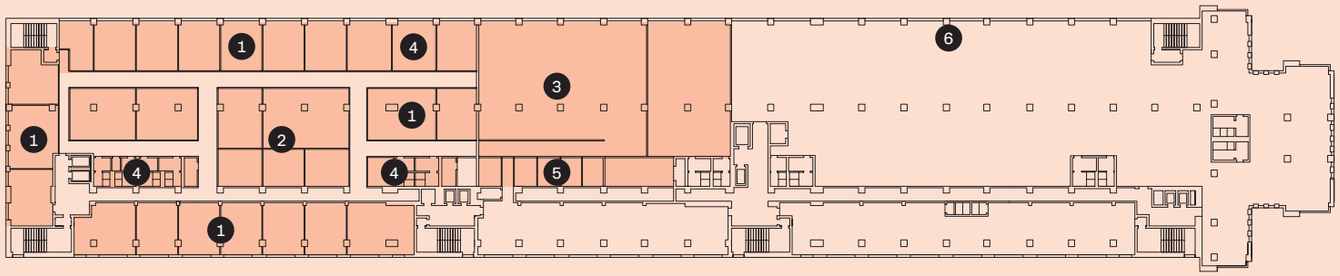
MT: What we presented at DoFA was not a finished project but a collection of conclusions from our research. By comparing different buildings, we gained insights into what worked and what didn't in the various adaptation processes. On this basis, we developed a structure that can serve as a guide and set of rules for designing more flexible architecture, both inside and in terms of its relationship to the exterior. We are not proposing it as a ready-made template for development, as such a structure would be intolerable if repeated and would result in a generic cityscape. We showed an interactive model where visitors can move and add or remove elements. It worked well in an exhibition setting – people moved floor slabs and added balconies.

ŁS: We wanted to show that today it no longer makes sense to design buildings that only fit their original function. Of course, each functional programme has its own specific requirements, but if we look at the city as a whole, we will find that buildings are basically spatial resources whose function can change several times during their life cycle. Therefore, we consider buildings a transfunctional resource.

▩ Screening room and external view of the Mars office building in Warsaw
Photo: Łukasz Stępnik

↓ Plan of the 6th floor of the Mars office buildings – spaces adapted for Ukrainian refugees
Drawing: Studio Widoki for DoFA 2022

TRANSLATED FROM POLISH BY NATALIA RACZKOWSKA

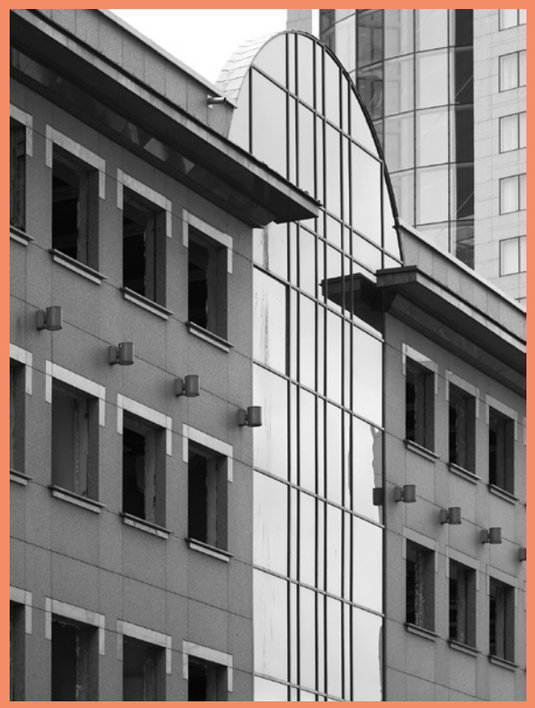


MARS
4TH FLOOR

1 living rooms
2 meetingg rooms
3 canteen
4 toilets and showers
5 storage
6 the rest of the floor made available after October 2022

0 5 10m

The international ATRIUM INTERNATIONAL



Windowless Atrium International before demolition, Warsaw, March 2023
Photo: Kuba Rodziewicz

We tell the story of the Atrium in three acts. In the first act, we explain how a plot of land in Warsaw's Wola district became the setting for an international business investment experiment. In the second act, we follow the process of a temporary change in the building's functional programme. In the final act, we tell the story of the new life of the building's architectural substance.

The multifaceted story of the Atrium inspired us to reflect on the building practices of the transformation period and how we build today, in this age of dynamic growth. Should we design buildings to last, or should we enable their systematic and effective dismantling and reuse of materials? What distinguishes 1990s office buildings from those built in the era of late capitalism? The former, although still young, are being demolished to make way for new glass towers. One of the excuses often given by investors is the claim that the architecture of the transformation era no longer meets the current market requirements in terms of typologies, building density, and aesthetics. However, many buildings from that period are still in good condition and tell the architectural story of the transitions and aspirations of their time.

INTERNATIONAL CAPITAL, POLISH ARCHITECTURE[1]

The demolition of the Atrium a office building (Atrium Business Centre), located on a site between the Śródmieście and Wola districts of Warsaw, was completed in July 2023. Designed by the Kazimierski and Ryba architecture studio, the building was part of a larger office and retail building complex along the western frontage of Aleja Jana Pawła II. Construction took place between 1992 and 2001, following a decision of the Wola District Council from May 1990. The investment was preceded by extensive preparations, including consultations with foreign advisors, who suggested developing the project in a public-private partnership model – a novelty at the time. The involvement of private (including foreign) capital in the design of public space was a sign of the changes to come. The Atrium was built on the

1 This section of the article was written based on the interview with Grzegorz Buczek conducted by Zuzanna Mielczarek and Mateusz Włodarek on 18.09.2023 in preparations for the *Benefis Atrium* exhibition.

site of a former market that was demolished – like many other street trading sites – between the late 1990s and early 2000s to make way for major new investments. In order to minimise – at least in theory – the negative impact on the market's traders and customers, the demolition and subsequent development were planned to be implemented in phases.

In the early 1990s, the Wola district was associated with aspirations of business experimentation and dreams of a prosperous lifestyle amidst office towers – an image popularised at the time by Western films and TV series. The development of the district, which was known as the Wild West of Warsaw, steered it towards a more cosmopolitan and metropolitan notion of the West.[2] For these Western dreams to come true, it was first necessary to attract the attention of that desirable part of the world to the investment potential of Poland. "Your opportunity – Twoja szansa", proclaimed a banner adorning the façade of Atrium Plaza, the third part of the complex, built between 1997 and 1998[3]. The 1990s vision for Poland's development materialised in the Atrium complex – its worldly ambitions of elegance and prestige, but a somewhat tame and non-threatening form and scale.

With the help of a consulting firm, Tomasz Buczek – architect, urbanist, and representative of the Wola municipality authorities at the time – defined a framework for action and the preferred type of partnership. Wola District Council was to offer a plot of land in exchange for a share of the profits and supervision of the investment process. The procedure was initiated with the announcement of a competition to select an investor – a strategic partner. The tender was publicised mainly in the English-language press, and a total of 19 companies applied, presenting their business and architectural concepts.[4] Three proposals were selected for the next stage and the main criterion for picking the winner was – besides the architecture – the proposed business model.

The bid from the Swedish company SKANSKA was the best in terms of economics, but the quality of the proposed architectural design left much to be desired: the Swedes presented a concept with four skyscrapers. Although their vision would suit the current development trend, as a glass skyscraper is currently being planned on the site of the demolished Atrium, the authorities at the time envisioned the Wola business district differently. Warsaw City Planning Commission recommended keeping this foreign investor but tasking Polish architects with coming up with a design that would be more consistent with the contemporaneous vision for the urban development of this part of Warsaw. SKANSKA agreed, but on the condition that the project would be awarded to architects who already had experience of working with a foreign investor and had a good command of the English language. The invitation was eventually extended to the young Warsaw architects Tomasz Kazimierski and Andrzej Ryba, authors of one of the most famous projects in the centre of Warsaw at that time – the McDonald's pavilion located next to the Sezam department store. Kaźmierski and Ryba recalled that the square in front of McDonald's was a favourite spot for foreign TV journalists reporting on the systemic transformation in Poland. They framed their shots to show the American fast food chain in a modern, reflective glass building in the foreground, and the communist Palace of Culture and Science in the background.[5] The young architects were given the unique – in early 90s Poland – opportunity to design with a foreign partner, which meant frequent visits to Malmö, where they encountered standards and working conditions that were completely different from what they knew in Poland.

The architects' ambition was to contrast the neighbouring modernist apartment blocks of Osiedle za Żelazną Bramą. They decided to create a metropolitan frontage. Their design referenced the socialist-realist Muranów housing estate in its façade articulation, height, and even

2 "Życie Warszawy" 1993, issue 79, p. 14

3 D. Bartoszewicz, *Pastiż socrealizmu*, "Gazeta Stołeczna", 5.03.1998, p. 3.

4 Interview with Grzegorz Buczek, 18.09.2023, op. cit.

5 A. Stępień-Dąbrowska, *Jakby luksusowo*, Warszawa: Narodowy Instytut Architektury i Urbanistyki, 2021, pp. 156–157.

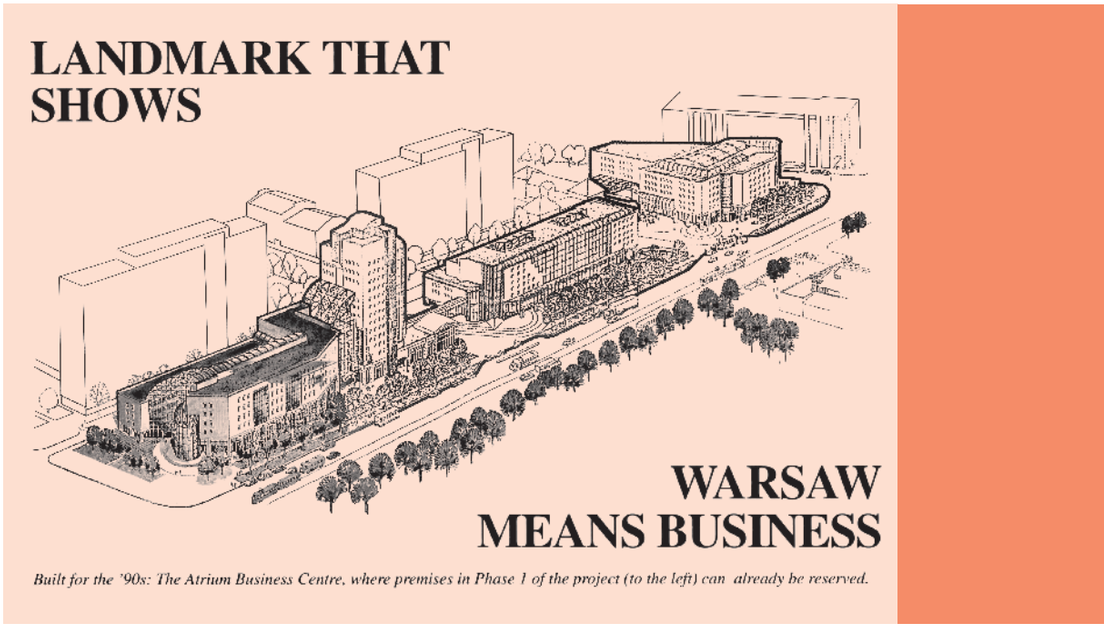


Illustration of the four parts of the Atrium complex, including the demolished part 1
Drawing: SKANSKA Worldwide bro-chure, p. 8, No. 2, Summer 1993, published by SKANSKA AB, Daneryd, Sweden

the shape of the windows. They also took inspiration from Hale Mirowskie [twin market halls built in the early 20th century – translator's note] and envisioned a covered passageway where the new class of businesspeople could stroll. However, this idea was not popular due to the lack of continuity of access for pedestrians between the different parts of the complex, which would be managed by different entities.

The Atrium Business Centre Phase I prospectus published by SKANSKA described the project's aspirations in the distinct style of property developer advertising brochures of the 1990s:

> The four-phase project allows the tenants to grow alongside the developing Polish market, while maintaining the high quality they expect. Designed with prestige and flexibility as the key features, the Atrium provides a unique opportunity to acquire top quality office and retail space.[6]

The Atrium complex was an example of an exceptionally coherent architectural and urban design that reflected the zeitgeist, built with the involvement of foreign capital. The complex had a significant impact on the functioning and development of this part of Warsaw in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Like many other office and retail buildings of the transformation period, the Atrium did not meet the hugely costly efficiency standards of late capitalism. Its new owner – the Austrian company STRABAG – decided to demolish it and build a new skyscraper called Upper One, designed by Medusa Group in line with current trends in the development of the neighbourhood. However, before the demolition took place, the abandoned office building was given a new lease of life.

INTERNATIONAL SHELTER

In spring 2022, the Atrium found itself in a completely new international context. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the resilience of Polish cities and their buildings was put to the test as a result of the massive influx of people seeking shelter from war. In March 2022 alone, over 2.5 million Ukrainians arrived in Poland; most of them settled, at least initially, in larger cities. At that time, even before the war-related population increase, the housing shortage in Poland was estimated at 1.5–2 million units. Large venues, such as the PTAK Expo hall in Nadarzyn, provided ad hoc accommodation, but the vast space of a trade fair pavilion is alien to the housing typology. Even though makeshift, or in some cases more durable, partitions were put up, any semblance of privacy, rest, and separation from the thousands of other residents in the hall was virtually impossible.

It so happened that, at the time of the initial influx of refugees, many of Warsaw's office buildings from the 1990s stood empty, awaiting remodelling or demolition. Office buildings of the transformation period were not as standardised and painfully efficient as those built to today's standards in the unified international style. The architects of the 1990s and 2000s could indulge in a bit of madness or generosity in their designs in terms of form, square footage, or materials. This coincidence made it possible, despite the severe shortage of public housing in Warsaw, to quickly organise accommodation under humanitarian conditions, to the extent that the situation allowed. Vacant council flats were unfit to house the refugees, and the city authorities claimed that fixing them would be too costly. Private investors and owners of vacant disused office buildings, such as Atrium, Ilmet, Warta Tower and Mars, came to the rescue.

An agreement between the new owner of the Atrium A building – the Austrian property developer STRABAG – and the Warsaw city authorities allowed refugees to stay in the building for a few months until they became self-sufficient on the job and housing markets. The urgent need for housing necessitated the adaptation of the office building to an entirely new purpose. The efforts were coordinated by an NGO. The Atrium thus became a refugee shelter in Warsaw, providing accommodation and a place for a whole new community that was very different from and more diverse than the white collar workers who had worked there over the years. The Atrium's transition from an elegant business

6 *Atrium Business Centre Phase I*, Malmö–Warsaw, SKANSKA, 1992.

7 Ibid.

Dismantling of windows in the Atrium office building, March 2023
Photo: Kuba Rodziewicz

centre into a makeshift home for refugees has not only political but also symbolic meaning. There could hardly be a more fitting illustration of social and humanitarian transformation than the contrast between the tidy luxurious office interiors[7] and the hastily adapted living spaces with camp beds and mattresses. The dynamic process of transformation in the face of crisis proved the capacity for adaptation and social solidarity.

Analysing this humanitarian episode in the Atrium's history shows how values and social aspirations preserved in the form of a building are re-evaluated. The dreams of prestige and luxury written in stone, brick, and glass had to give way to new, more fundamental priorities: providing safe and dignified living conditions for people in need. Businessmen and women were replaced by Ukrainian refugees. a place that had once symbolised the economic power and prestige of a developing Poland and its foreign investors became a symbol of adaptation, empathy, and solidarity. From this perspective, it is easier to understand how the building's form and function have been shaped by social, political, and economic changes. The Atrium's transformation not only demonstrates an adaptation to new realities in an emergency but is also a testament to a new inclusivity in the face of crisis. Although the planned demolition only allowed for a short-term crisis-relief solution, the office building was successfully adapted for residential use, thus proving that abandoning the investment status quo – geared towards increasing profits and constant economic growth – can allow us to transform abandoned office buildings into long-term accommodation for people in need.

INTERNATIONAL CIRCULATION OF PINK WINDOWS

Buildings from the transformation period are slowly disappearing from Warsaw's cityscape. Following the Atrium, other buildings awaiting demolition include the neighbouring PZU headquarters at Aleja Jana Pawła II, Ilmet, Curtis Plaza, and the LAND shopping centre. What are we to do with the materiality of today's disappearing architecture? Does demolition leave behind only dead, useless waste? Will the vital deposits of now-redundant bricks, granite, marble, claddings, and windows that are stored at building depots, warehouses, and construction sites remain there, helpless, and idle? With the demolition of the Atrium, a pilot study was carried out – an attempt to reflect on but also practically analyse our ways of building in a period of dynamic economic growth. The case of the Atrium makes us wonder how we should build today: should we make buildings that last, or should we enable their systematic and efficient dismantling and the reuse of materials? Not every reclaimed material lends itself to easy reuse in architecture, but a window removed with appropriate care and attention can fit in well in a new place. In collaboration with the owner of the Atrium, the BRDA Foundation, initiator of the OKNO project, was able to reclaim 217 pink-framed windows from the building. Thanks to the efforts of Zofia Jaworowska and Petro Vladimirov, they were taken from the demolition site and installed in residential buildings for people in need in Ukraine, including places in Kharkiv oblast that have been destroyed by Russians. No less than 85 of them decorate and protect houses in the village of Kamyanka, whose architectural landscape has been completely transformed by these characteristic fuchsia windows that once adorned a building symbolising the dream of Poland's economic development into a free-market powerhouse, helping restore appropriate living conditions in this small settlement in a different country and context, where windows are the architectural elements that get damaged most easily during bombing raids. This is the most tangible proof of the great social potential of reclaimed building materials.

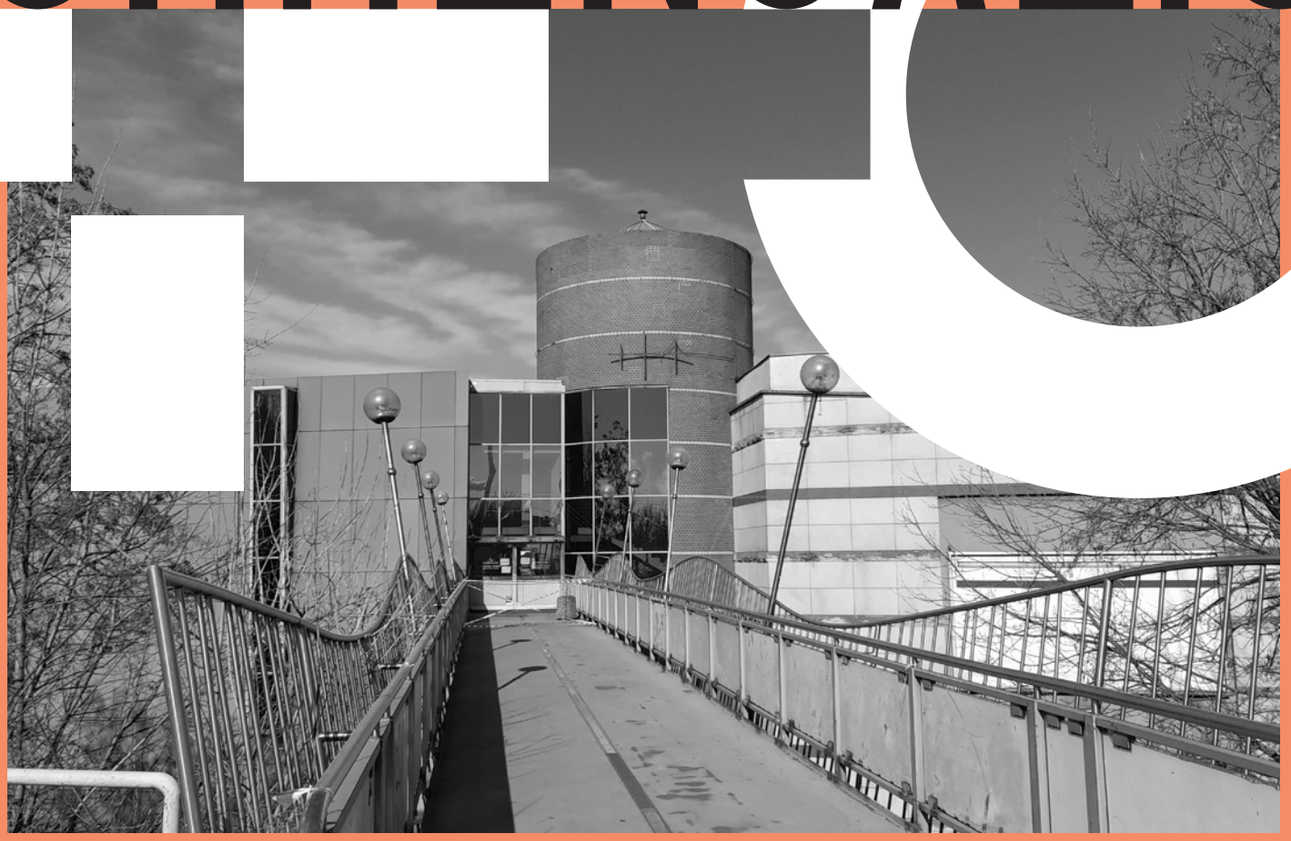
Another material reclaimed during the demolition of the Atrium was the granite façade cladding, which the investor will probably reuse in the new building. The BRDA Foundation, together with the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning, has also secured the ceiling panels, mirrors, nameplates, dividers, and door hardware for potential future reuse. Fit-out and finishing materials from 1990s office buildings are not an easy legacy to work with as it is difficult to find them a new purpose. Much depends on the condition of the material and the potential of its use one-to-one with a particular recipient.

The fate of many buildings, not just Atrium A, shows the possibilities of creative and sustainable reuse of building materials. Out of necessity, humanitarian and rescue efforts have mobilised us to initiate the necessary discussion and have helped reveal the hidden potential of demolition and reuse. Construction waste is not useless. Instead of seeing demolition as the end, we should see it as the beginning of a new life cycle for building components. The short-term but successful adaptation of the Atrium for residential purposes makes us question whether it is necessary or justified to demolish buildings at all.

TRANSLATED FROM POLISH BY NATALIA RACZKOWSKA

Infrastructures of

COMMENSALISM



Neoliberal-humanitarian symbiosis at the Galeria Plaza mall-shelter

Closed entrance of Galeria Plaza, March 2022
Photo: Dorota Leśniak-Rychlak

TEXT
Oliver Banatvala

For most of 2022, a blue and yellow billboard with the words Solidarność Partnerstwo (Solidarity Partnership) hung on the facade of Galeria Plaza, a disused shopping mall located at Aleja Pokoju in Krakow. Following Russia's full-scale invasion, this was one of many displays of solidarity with Ukraine – flags, murals, graffiti, light shows – in cities across the globe. Each of them stemmed from various socio-political infrastructures and networks[1].

In this instance, the billboard signified a symbiosis between neoliberalism and humanitarianism growing inside an ostensibly unremarkable empty shopping mall. In an attempt to help the city officials cope with the influx of refugees, STRABAG Real Estate had transformed Galeria Plaza into a shelter, providing accommodation, food, and clothing to Ukrainians fleeing their country following Russia's full-scale invasion.

This article delves into the symbiotic relationship between the neoliberal and humanitarian systems that existed within Galeria Plaza at the time. Since there are many forms of neoliberalism across the globe, I define Polish urban neoliberalism as a system typified by foreign investment, resulting in market-orientation, limited state involvement with regards to urban planning and development, and the dominance of multinational corporations within urban space.[2] Alongside these elements occurs the growth of local Polish corporations with global commercial ties.

Following Xiang and Lindquist's definition of migration infrastructure as "the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility",[3] I depict the fusion of neoliberalism and humanitarianism within the mall-shelter as an *infrastructure of commensalism*: a form of symbiosis in which one organism experiences net gain, while the other is unaffected overall. I label it a "mall-shelter" as it captures the symbiosis of the two identities that Galeria Plaza possessed at the time.

I explore three elements of the infrastructure of commensalism. First, the mall-shelter's spatial characteristics and how they influenced the experience of those inside. Second, the relations that were established and developed in the mall-shelter, with reference to Nunes's conception of organisational ecology.[4] Finally, the temporality of this partnership: the role of architectural obsolescence and serendipity in the (dis)appearance of the mall-shelter.

COMMENSALISM

Mathis and Bronstein define commensalism as "an interaction between two species in which individuals of one species receive a net benefit, while individuals of a second species are on balance unaffected".[5] The natural world provides various examples: remora fish attach themselves to sharks in order to feed on scraps of their prey; epiphytic plants grow on host trees; certain birds, such as cattle egret, forage insects that live on of the backs of cattle;

1 Thomas Schielke, 'Cities Light Up in Solidarity With Ukraine: From Internationally Synchronized Illuminations to Projection Activism, Drone Shows and Global Art Projects', in *Proceedings of the 6th Media Architecture Biennale Conference* (presented at the MAB '23: Media Architecture Biennale 2023, Toronto ON Canada, 2023), 14–27 https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3627611.3627613 (accessed: 3.04.2024).

2 Małgorzata Barbara Havel, 'Neoliberalization of Urban Policy-Making and Planning in Post-Socialist Poland – a Distinctive Path from the Perspective of Varieties of Capitalism', Cities, 127 (2022), pp. 1–11, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2022.103766.

3 Biao Xiang and Johan Lindquist, 'Migration Infrastructure', International Migration Review, 48/s1 (2014), p. 124.

4 Rodrigo Nunes, *Neither Vertical nor Horizontal: a Theory of Political Organisation* (London–New York, 2021).

5 Kaitlyn A. Mathis and Judith L. Bronstein, 'Our Current Understanding of Commensalism', Annual Review of Ecology, Evolution and Systematics, 51/Volume 51 (2020), p. 172.

morel mushrooms gain energy from rotting tree roots.[6] As this is not a biology paper, I do not intend to measure to what extent these cases are truly commensalistic;[7] instead, I invoke this biological imagery in order to help visualise the relationship between neoliberalism and humanitarianism within the Galeria Plaza mall-shelter.

Commensalism is a phenomenon that has received little attention in scientific research,[8] and by extension even less as a metaphor for understanding the conditions of urbanity. Nevertheless, this term has previously been applied to the urban realm. Aleksandar Staničić and Milan Šijakovic use it in their analysis of the post-war reconstruction in Serbia to describe the relationship between "the damaged building – which derives 'nutrition' through structural, material, formal or spatial upgrading – and the new intervention, which poses no threat to the formal and spatial integrity of the original building".[9] Their analysis presents commensalism as one of three forms of symbiosis (alongside mutualism and parasitism) that are "deeply rooted in environmentally and socially sustainable development",[10] indicating the potential productivity of biological terminology in analysing urban processes.

While exploring the commensalistic relationship between the networks of neoliberalism and humanitarianism at Galeria Plaza, it is difficult to quantitatively measure the extent to which the systems of neoliberalism were affected by the charitable offshoot that grew within its spaces. However, I view this relationship as commensalism – rather than parasitism or mutualism – because the limited impact of the mall-shelter on the broader neoliberal ecosystem was neither distinctly positive nor negative. In some ways it hindered neoliberalism: the space was used for another, non-profit purpose, rented out for 1 złoty per month, as Polish law prohibits leasing free of charge. The profits made at this time were clearly negligible. Yet, in other ways, the project supported and entrenched neoliberalism, forging new partnerships between corporations and the municipality, as well as improving their brand image through a sort of "refugee-washing", evidenced by newsletters and articles that highlighted their ongoing work.[11] This was particularly problematic given the pivotal role of STRABAG – the owner of the site – and its murky ties to sanctioned Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska, who was a shareholder in the corporation until March 2024.[12] Neoliberalism was "on balance unaffected" by this humanitarianism, rendering the relationship commensalistic.[13]

THE AMBIVALENCE OF NEOLIBERAL SPACE

It was too big. I mean, it wasn't too big for us, for the project, because we could have everything in one place, both warehouse and distribution. So the logistics part of the of the job was not that demanding because we had the stock in one place, but the shop itself was too big. We could have 140 beneficiaries inside at the same time. I don't know if there ever was such a big free shop in a humanitarian, in like an emergency response context. I don't know if it has ever existed before. From my experience from Greece [laughs] it was unbelievable, to be honest, to see such a big Free Shop. It was too big, because a free shop is not a regular shop.

HUMANITARIAN WORKER BASED AT *SZAFA DOBRA*

The mall-shelter was dependent on the spatial structures of neoliberalism; more specifically, it materialised in a shopping mall, a space that, in the Polish context, epitomises neoliberal consumer culture. Across the globe, the mall is considered an archetypal structure of globalised capitalism. This is particularly true in Central and Eastern Europe, where the rate of construction of new shopping malls since the end of socialism has been rapid,[14] fuelled by the influx of international investment and encouraged by deregulation and lax planning policies.[15] As a result they have become a typology which is fundamentally of the neoliberal era, "a self-conscious symbol of [neoliberal] capitalism as opposed to socialism".[16] The existence of the mall-shelter within this neoliberal

6 S. Wali Abdi, 'Survival Through Symbiosis: Investigate These Interactions', The Science Teacher, 59/1 (1992), pp. 22–27.

7 Mathis and Bronstein, 'Our Current Understanding of Commensalism', op. cit., pp. 167–189.

8 Carlos Naranjo et al., 'Evaluating the Structure of Commensalistic Epiphyte–Phorophyte Networks: a Comparative Perspective of Biotic Interactions', *AoB PLANTS*, 11/2 (2019), p. 2.

9 Aleksandar Staničić and Milan Šijaković, '(Re)Building Spaces of Tolerance: a "Symbiotic Model" for the Post-War City Regeneration', *Architecture and Culture*, 7/1 (2019), p. 119.

10 Ibid., p. 123.

11 STRABAG, *STRABAG w Polsce dla Ukrainy*, 4.04.2022, 19; 'IKEA przekazała produkty dla osób dotkniętych wojną', *IKEA*, 2022 https://www.ikea.com/pl/pl/newsroom/stories/ikea-w-krakowie-przekazala-ponad-35-tys-produktow-na-rzecz-osob-dotknietych-wojna-w-ukrainie-pub65655be0 (accessed: 8.04.2024).

12 Alexandra Schwarz-Goerlich, 'Russian Tycoon's Strabag Stake Changes Hands amid Raiffeisen Deal Uncertainty', *Reuters*, 27.03.2024, section Business https://www.reuters.com/business/deripaska-transfers-strabag-stake-russian-firm-iliadis-2024-03-27 (accessed: 30.04.2024).

13 Mathis and Bronstein, 'Our Current Understanding of Commensalism', 172.

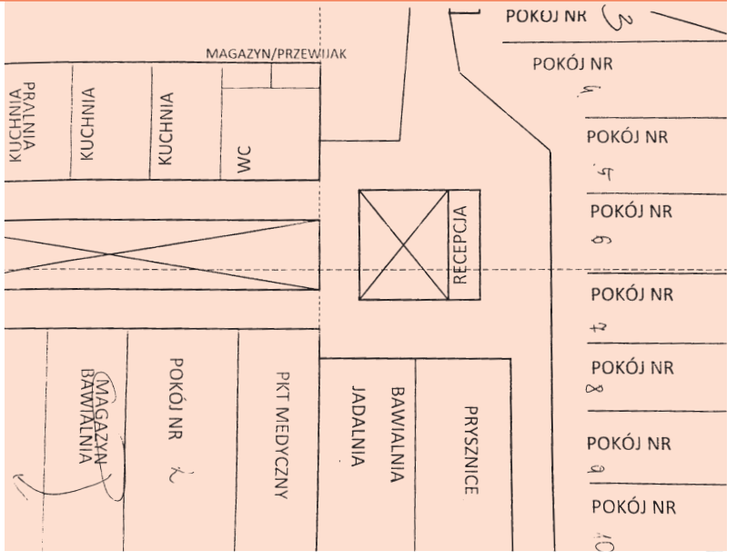
14 Yaakov Garb and Tomasz Dybicz, 'The Retail Revolution in Post-Socialist Central Europe and Its Lessons', in *The Urban Mosaic of Post-Socialist Europe*, ed. by Sasha Tsenkova and Zorica Nedović-Budić, Contributions to Economics (Heidelberg, 2006), pp. 231–33 http://link.springer.com/10.1007/3-7908-1727-9_12 (accessed: 8.01.2023).

15 Kiril Stanilov, 'The Restructuring of Non-Residential Uses in the Post-Socialist Metropolis', in *The Post-Socialist City*, ed. by Kiril Stanilov, The GeoJournal Library (Dordrecht, 2007), xcii, pp. 89–90 http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-1-4020-6053-3_5 (accessed: 22.12. 2022).

16 Gregory Andrusz, 'Wall and Mall: a Metaphor for Metamorphosis', in *The Urban Mosaic of Post-Socialist Europe: Space, Institutions and Policy*, op. cit., p. 85.

T: Oliver Banatvala

"Solidarność Partnerstwo" (Solidarity Partnership) banner next to the STRABAG company sign on the facade of the closed Galeria Plaza, April 2022
Photo: Oliver Banatvala



Makeshift plan of the temporary refugee shelter organised by MOPS in the abandoned Galeria Plaza in Kraków
Photo: Dorota Leśniak-Rychlak

space is the first way this commensalistic relationship manifested.

The charitable function of the shelter was spatially dependent on the neoliberal typology of the mall. Workers, volunteers, and residents remarked on the eerie echoes of its past life – something I also noticed when volunteering. Cinemas, gyms, escalators, shop fronts, shop floors, ramps, freezer rooms, advertisement boards: the space was full of these remnants of the mall, an imprint of the ideology of neoliberalism on the everyday experience of the mall-shelter[17] in the same way as the spatial characteristics of the mall shaped the functioning of the mall-shelter.

The quote at the beginning of this section illustrates the somewhat ambivalent nature of the space. In some ways, the spatial layout benefitted refugees who had just arrived in the city. The mall-shelter consisted of three main areas: the free shop, Szafa Dobra, which offered clothes and necessities to new arrivals in the city; World Central Kitchen, which provided meals in tents in the car park; and the accommodation facilities, run by Miejski Ośrodek Pomocy Społecznej (Municipal Centre for Social Welfare, MOPS). The concentration of facilities allowed for more widespread accessibility of humanitarian aid and was particularly beneficial for people with limited mobility, as evidenced by one of my interviewees. It also helped the humanitarian workers carry out certain tasks. As we see above, the size of the space is described as "unbelievable" in comparison with other free shops. This helped the volunteers sort and distribute large quantities of clothing more efficiently and also eliminated the necessity of traveling between locations in order to unpack and repackage goods.

However, the mall-shelter had significant limitations. The aforementioned speaker alludes to the difficulty with crowd control due to the size of the free shop. There were also issues for the tenants of the shelter. Galeria Plaza was not a facility designed to house hundreds of people, and the transformation from a derelict mall to refugee accommodation necessarily took place in a matter of days. Using a neoliberal typology for such a radically different purpose led to many problems and raised many questions surrounding the quality of the provisions. Multiple beds were cramped into former shops, meaning there was little privacy, which led to people building walls out of suitcases from Szafa Dobra to separate their own space.

There were also significant issues with ventilation, exacerbated by the few windows in the former shops and the non-existent heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system (dismantled and looted before the shelter was established). As a result, the building constantly smelled of damp and was too cold in winter and too hot in summer. These conditions were ripe for spreading illness among the residents: there were many reports of illness, and the cramped and stuffy conditions made it even harder to recover. One person lived there for over two months and only felt well for three weeks, while others left for fear of getting ill. The spatial imprint of neoliberalism limited the success of this place and its ability to function as accommodation. These humanitarian networks' reliance on neoliberal spatiality was the direct cause of significant shortcomings since it had to borrow and thus rapidly adapt to various spatial and material features of the mall, which were unsuitable for its purpose.

17 Roberto Sáyago et al., 'Evaluating Factors That Predict the Structure of a Commensalistic Epiphyte–Phorophyte Network', *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 280/1756 (2013), p. 2.

ECOLOGICAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

[The mall] was given to us by a private company or private owner, I'm not sure about it. There was a great response from the local people who were coming to volunteer and donated so much. But also several private companies sent us really, really, really helpful items that were more difficult to get because they had to be new, for example underwear, socks, mainly shoes. We had to procure them, and we received huge donations of shoes from several companies. So it was really nice how both people from civil society and from, let's say, government society were really keen to help. It's very nice.
HUMANITARIAN WORKER BASED AT *SZAFA DOBRA*

The relations that existed within the mall-shelter can be understood through Nunes's concept of organisational ecology,

> a distributed ecology of relations traversing and bringing together different forms of action (aggregate, collective), disparate organizational forms (affinity groups, informal networks, unions, parties), the individuals that compose or collaborate with them, unaffiliated individuals who attend [...], share material online or even just sympathetically follow developments on the news, webpages and social media profiles, physical spaces, and so on[18].

A unique organisational ecology developed in the mall-shelter. At its heart was STRABAG Real Estate, the corporation that owned the mall at the time of Russia's full-scale invasion. STRABAG funded and swiftly carried out the repurposing of the mall with help from both its employees and volunteers. I have heard differing accounts as to whether the mall-shelter was an initiative of this corporation or the city council; however, the fact that it was one of the two suggests that the power of private corporations in the neoliberal urban landscape in some ways equals that of the municipal authorities. The power structures of the neoliberal city give corporations like STRABAG considerable influence to carry out such large-scale projects.

The mall-shelter was also dependent on other neoliberal actors, including multinational organisations such as IKEA, Polish brands such as Diverse, as well as local suppliers and entrepreneurs. These individuals and companies established and engaged pre-existing networks and supply chains to help donate items ranging from beds to coat hangers, signs to sausages. Again, we see the commensalistic nature of this relationship: the charitable networks feed off and develop from the offshoots of neoliberalism, with little overall impact on the neoliberal structures.

As mentioned, STRABAG rented out the space to NGOs for a minimal fee. These NGOs were both domestic (Internationaler Bund Polska) and international (World Central Kitchen and a Drop in the Ocean). They were underpinned by "the individuals that compose or collaborate with them, [and] unaffiliated individuals",[19] staffed by local and international volunteers. The organisation of their work also relied on systems of corporate neoliberalism: shifts were organized via Google Spreadsheets, and volunteers participated in regular training sessions. Moreover, many of them were employees of local Krakow companies, which sanctioned their participation by allowing them to take time off. Indeed, the publisher of "Autoportret" itself, Małopolska Institute of Culture, allowed its employees to use 20% of their working time to volunteer at Plaza, or any other place which was organising aid for Ukraine.

Another branch of this ecology was the state infrastructure. The municipal authorities played a significant role, with MOPS running the accommodation facilities. The initiative relied on state-centred bureaucracy: in order to receive aid, the refugees needed to present their passports that had been stamped at the border on or after 24th February. Political figures, such as Andrzej Kulig and Łukasz Wańtuch, also visited the shelter, legitimising it with their support but also using it to embellish their own image by making speeches and giving interviews on site. Wańtuch caused a scandal when he gave the citizens of Krakow goods intended for Ukrainians, raising questions regarding politicians' intentions towards the initiative.[20]

In his description of organisational ecologies, Nunes speaks of the importance of engage-

18 Nunes, *Neither Vertical nor Horizontal*, op. cit., pp. 163–164.

19 Ibid.

20 Marcin Banasik, 'Kraków. Radny Wańtuch „redystrybuuje" pomoc od krakowian. Jedna konserwa za pięćdziesiąt kołder. Społecznik zarzuca mu nadużycia', *Gazeta Krakowska*, 2022 https://gazetakrakowska.pl/krakow-radny-wantuch-redystrybuuje- pomoc-od- krakowian-jedna-konserwa-za-piecdziesiat-kolder- spolecznik-zarzuca-mu-naduzycia/ar/c1-16291075 (accessed: 7.12.2023).

21 Nunes, *Neither Vertical nor Horizontal*, op. cit., p. 164.

ment from social and traditional media.[21] The existence of the mall-shelter was broadcasted by national and international journalists and widely discussed on social media groups for refugees arriving in Krakow. Although it may seem peripheral in relation to the purpose of the mall-shelter, the media presence actually constituted a key part, enabling the message of its existence to be spread wider to new "individuals that compose or collaborate" within this space.[22] Without it, the mall-shelter would not have developed as it did.

This brief outline of certain actors seeks to demonstrate the complexity of the organizational ecology of the mall-shelter and echoes Xiang and Lindquist's description of migration infrastructure.[23] Volunteers' participation was fluid: some would be present just briefly, whilst others were there from beginning to end. Some would collaborate constantly; others would fleetingly intersect or not at all. The ecology of support that existed within the space was clearly dynamic, proving that biological imagery – ecologies or commensalism – adequately reflects the flexibility of the urban realm. The centrality of neoliberal corporations, however, is a reminder that the mall-shelter existed on their terms – a reminder of the commensalistic nature of these infrastructures.

THE SERENDIPITY OF OBSOLESCENCE

It was one of the first shopping malls here. So at some point, it became old fashioned, yeah? Then there started to be new ones, modern ones with maybe bigger or better interiors, nicer, you know, buildings. And at some point, it was quite old fashioned but still nice. I remember I would only go there to play billiards. And I think cinema. Not, not for shopping. Not then. So inside, it was still the same, I mean, it wasn't because it was not such a long time after the shop stopped to function. I don't remember how long it was empty. But still inside it was nice. Quite nice.

MOPS EMPLOYEE AND RESIDENT OF KRAKOW

This quote points to the meaning of temporality in the story of Galeria Plaza. The existence of the mall-shelter was a direct result of the role that economic calculations play in the transience of certain spaces in the neoliberal city. Commensalistic relationships exist within time: the lifespans of the organisms may be tied up in some way, but they are neither equal nor infinite. Morel mushrooms use dead wood to gain energy; in a similar way, the mall-shelter "lived" off the "dead mall"[24], existed in the vacuum between its sale and demolition.

This indicates the role of architectural obsolescence, a phenomenon which is just as temporal as "a specific economic dynamic of capitalism, namely its process of rapid supersession and discard"[25].

Galeria Plaza opened in 2001 and instantly became a popular mall. It was a clear case of the architecture of the late 90s and early 00s – a new, globalised form, kitsch and colourful but not always received positively. Michał Wiśniewski, for instance, criticised it as being "largely subjected to mindlessly adopted global models [...] ignor[ing] the context, reaching for banal and repeatable solutions and redefining the cityscape around them by virtue of their scale".[26] At least in the case of Galeria Plaza, the influence was only temporary: it was demolished 20 years later.

Neoliberal spaces are generally perceived as having limited historical, social, or cultural value. Once the Plaza stopped being profitable, its obsolescence was immediate. This economic pressure meant that the mall-shelter was always going to be temporary. The obsolescence of Galeria Plaza, fuelled by the social Darwinism of neoliberalism, initiated a significant shift in the public's relationship with and use of this part of the city: existing habits and paths had to be altered to accommodate this transformation. STRABAG acquired the mall just weeks before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, with plans to redevelop the area as a "modern mixed-use facility"[27].

The land would eventually have to succumb to the neoliberal power of the market, which demands the profitability of space. The lease contracts for the NGOs were renewed on a rolling basis, allowing for a high level of flexibility; when the economic cost of maintaining

22 Ibid.

23 Xiang and Lindquist, 'Migration Infrastructure', p. 124.

24 Daniela Ferreira and Daniel Paiva, 'The Death and Life of Shopping Malls: An Empirical Investigation on the Dead Malls in Greater Lisbon', *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 27/4 (2017), pp. 317–333.

25 Daniel M. Abramson, *Obsolescence: An Architectural History* (Chicago, IL, US, 2016), p. 6 http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucl/detail.action?docID=4386757 (accessed: 18.07.2023).

26 Michał Wiśniewski, 'Kraków Architecture and Globalisation', in *Urban Change in Central Europe: The Case of Kraków*, ed. by Jacek Purchla, Routledge Advances in Regional Economics, Science and Policy (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY, 2023).

27 'Gallery Plaza: Krakow Gets a New Landmark', *STRABAG Real Estate* https://www.strabag-real-estate.com/en/project/gallery-plaza/ (accessed: 3.01.2023).

the mall-shelter no longer matched the benefit, the initiative could be quickly stopped and the redevelopment plans could resume.

There is a long string of chances that helped the mall-shelter materialise and provide aid and support to those fleeing Russia's war against Ukraine. If the Plaza had not failed economically, if it had been purchased earlier and redevelopment had started sooner, if it had been purchased by a different organization that did not have any philanthropic inclination, then the mall-shelter would not have existed. Perhaps something better may have appeared in its place; however, what is clear from this truncated list is the role that chance and serendipity play in the establishment of these commensalistic neoliberal-humanitarian infrastructures.

The vacuum created by the architectural obsolescence of Galeria Plaza became an opportunity for an ecology of support to coalesce in its spaces. This is not to reduce it to mere luck, as Grit explains: "[s]erendipities do not just happen by luck but, for their becom-ing, require a keen eye and a responsive attitude".[28] My focus on serendipity is meant not to deny or efface the various shortcomings I have mentioned but, instead, to draw attention to the high degree of contingency: the mall-shelter resulted from certain events unfolding at certain times, and certain individuals and organizations being in place. The commensalistic relationship was enabled by the "keen eye" and "responsive attitude" of actors who helped develop a humanitarian offshoot within the neoliberal system.[29]

IS COMMENSALISM A WAY FORWARD?

The Polish city is neoliberal in character, dominated by multinational investment and development, with planning influenced by market-orientation and minimal engagement from the state. This article has shown these dynamics reflected in the life of Galeria Plaza. Given the dominance of neoliberal urbanism within the Polish city, humanitarianism must find ways to navigate this system in order to continue provide support to those in need. The mall-shelter represents one such attempt. Understanding the relationship between neoliberalism and humanitarianism as commensalism enables us to ask which strategies humanitarian structures can adopt in order to exploit the neoliberal system in the future. The inbuilt distributive layout of the mall can be used to effectively share large quantities of humanitarian aid; certain brands' desire to enhance their image can be harnessed to acquire provisions; the brutality of architectural obsolescence can be seen as an opportunity – buildings *do* have potential to provide alternative functions when they are no longer profitable. True, many of the mall-shelter's significant flaws stemmed from relations, the temporality of this commensalism, and the continued domination of neoliberalism within the space, so perhaps it is not possible to manipulate or subvert neoliberalism further to humanitarianism's advantage. It is important to be selective when choosing the host within this relationship: other obsolete buildings, such as empty offices, could serve the purpose better than this mall, which had significant inherent issues. As a framework, commensalism can help direct attention towards the suitability of reappropriating certain neoliberal spaces for humanitarian purposes.

28 Alexander Grit, 'Messing around with Serendipities', in *Disruptive Tourism and Its Untidy Guests: Alternative Ontologies for Future Hospitalities*, ed. by Soile Veijola et al. (London, 2014), p. 133 https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137399502_6 (accessed: 4.04.2024).

29 Grit, 'Messing around with Serendipities', p. 133.

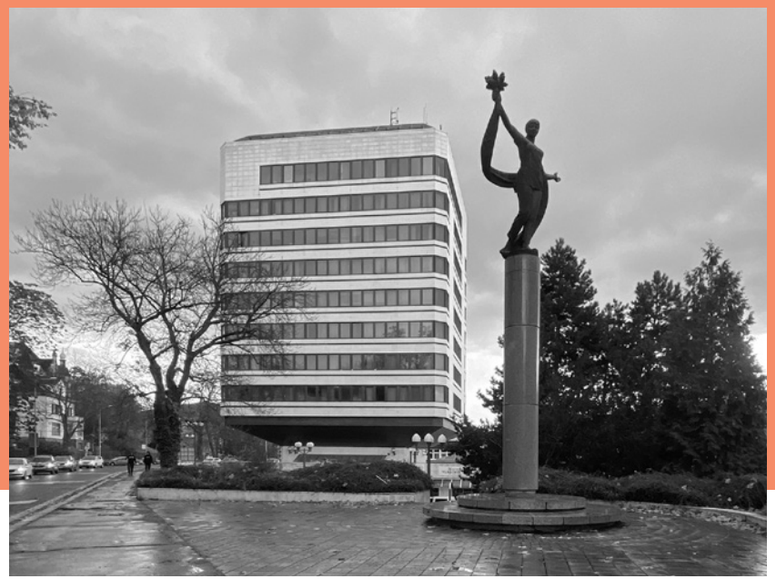
T: Oliver Banatvala

← Children's corner, *Szafa Dobra* in the former Galeria Plaza
Photo: archive of Internationaler Bund Polska

▩ Shelter in the section managed by MOPS in Kraków
Photo: Maciej Rodak

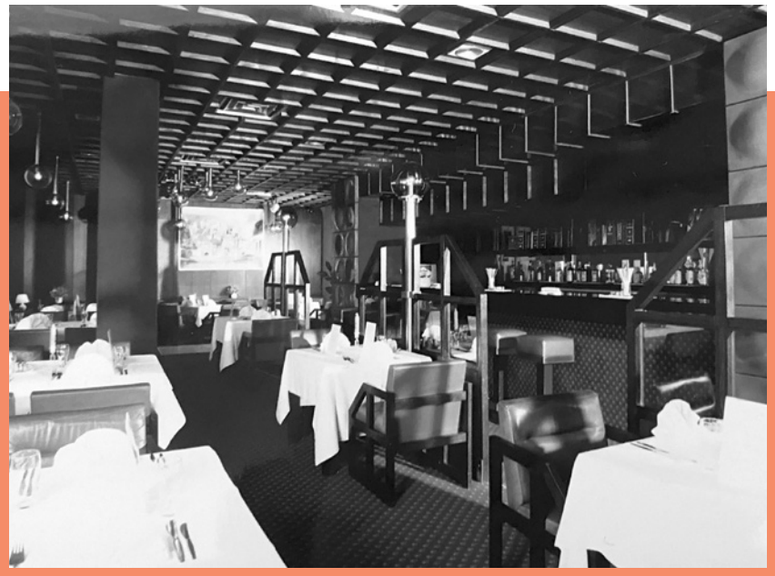
↓ Interior of the *Szafa Dobra* free shop
Photo: archive of Internationaler Bund Polska

▩ Interior of the *Szafa Dobra* free shop
Photo: archive of Internationaler Bund Polska



Vladimir Hotel, Friendship Monument visible in the foreground, 2024
Photo: Jana Pavlova

VOLODYMYR HOTEL



Vladimir Hotel, restaurant interior, 1986
Photo: archive of the Vladimir Hotel

→ Furniture and mattress bank in the former hotel bar, 2024
Photo: Jana Pavlova

TEXT
Jana Pavlová

The nine-storey hotel, formerly known as Hotel Vladimir, towers above other architectural landmarks in Ústí nad Labem, an important industrial centre in the north of the Czech Republic. In front of this prism-shaped building with a white marble façade stands a relic from a bygone era – a bronze statue of a woman on a tall pedestal that once greeted the Soviet tanks arriving in the city.

The monument is a reminder of the past glory of this former representative socialist hotel, whose name does not refer to the revolutionary and communist apostle Lenin, but is a nod to the Russian sister city of Ústí. Shortly after the Russian attack on Ukraine, the city of Ústí withdrew from the partnership agreement. Today, Ukrainian flags fly in front of the entrance to the hotel, which is now commonly referred to as the Volodymyr, and the "Friendship Monument" welcomes Ukrainian refugees, just as it did two years ago.

CPI Property Group, the second largest property owner in the Czech Republic, has opened the disused and locked-up hotel for humanitarian purposes. The company has privatised a considerable number of municipal flats and is responsible for some of the problems resulting from rent deregulation. The humanitarian initiative of refugee aid has initiated a symbolic transformation of the Vladimir – from a former representative socialist hotel into a collective housing block. How should we approach this important Ústí landmark in the future, and what does this example of an unexpected, makeshift conversion say about the potential purpose and use of ideologically charged, dilapidated architecture often awaiting demolition?

Ústí nad Labem has been one of the key industrial and commercial centres of the Czech Republic ever since the Austro-Hungarian period. Its predominantly German population has significantly influenced the development of both the city and its architecture. After the Munich Agreement of 1938, Ústí nad Labem was handed over to Nazi Germany. Towards the end of World War II, the city suffered heavy bombing raids that damaged many buildings in the historic centre. After the end of the war, the German citizens were expelled, which – together with the earlier expulsion and extermination of the local Jewish population – interrupted the historical continuity of the city. In the post-war period, the socialist regime prioritised the development of heavy industry, with a focus on lignite mining in the Ústí region. The city attracted a large number of newcomers, and with them its centre began to change. Officials took this as an opportunity to give the city a new, modern face.

What was spared during the bombing was later demolished by socialist modernisers. Urban development plans at the time envisaged the demolition of the entire historic centre, sparing only the churches and the headquarters of the savings bank. According to Martin Krsek, historian at the Ústí Museum, the communist city administration was heavily inspired by the radical approach taken in the

reconstruction of Dresden – another city that barely survived carpet bombing. Ultimately, the plan for Ústí was only partially realised.[1] One of the largest mass demolitions of historic districts in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic took place on 8 December 1979 in Fučíka Street – the city's main street. Eighteen townhouses that had previously been inhabited by Germans were blown up, and nineteen more neighbouring buildings followed three months later. They no longer met housing standards as they had no access to running hot water, the rooms were heated with coal stoves, the tenants had to share sanitary facilities, and the housing co-operative had given up on their maintenance.

A new retail and service centre with modern apartment blocks was relatively quickly built on the empty plots.[2] At the end of the boulevard, where today's Masarykova Street makes a sharp turn and merges into Churchill Street, the city authorities planned to build a youth centre. In the end, the site was earmarked for the construction of a luxurious, nine-storey hotel which would dominate the new cityscape.

The commission to design the hotel was given to Rudolf Berger and Zdeněk Havlík from the Regional Design Institute of Ústí nad Labem in 1983.[3] Inspired by brutalism, the architects shaped the building like a sculpture. Dark red, reflective glass panes contrast with the white marble cladding of the façade, while their rhythmic composition gives the design a certain graphic quality. When planning the functional layout and selecting the materials in the concept phase, the architects took into account the varied topography of the site. The utility and common rooms were placed in the concrete base of the building, which supports the frame structure of the main residential section. The base is topped by an open-access roof terrace, referencing the modernist buildings of the new city centre. Cascading flower beds with wild shrubs line the entrance from Churchill Street.

The hotel could accommodate 192 guests, mostly in two- and three-person rooms. a restaurant with a small buffet was located on the ground floor, next to the main entrance. On the top floor there was a rococo-style panoramic café for 70 guests. The common areas were designed in collaboration with architect Miroslav Novák and decorated with sculptures, paintings, and ceramic and wooden reliefs by artists Antonín Procházko, Jiři Novosad, Miroslav Žofka, Michael Bílek and František Čumpelík.[4] The architecture of Hotel Vladimir is both artistic and humorous; it is in line with Western postmodernism, just like the city's new retail and service centre. The headquarters of the District Council of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in the centre of Ústí was designed by Rudolf Berger in collaboration with Míťa Hejduk and Michal Gabriel in a similar style and at the same time as the Vladimir.

↘ Hotel Vladimir opened in 1986 and was managed by the state company Restaurace a jídelny until 1990. It was sold during the so-called "small privatisation" after the period of political and economic transformation;

this mainly concerned the retail sector – smaller companies and services were sold via public auctions. Ústí nad Labem is where small privatisation began in Czechoslovakia. The Vladimir was auctioned off on 5 October 1991 to the I.B.S. – Restaurants Hotels, spol s r.o. company, which was represented by one of its executives, Antonín Izák. At the time, it was the most expensive retail unit sold at auction; the asking price was 57 million Czechoslovak korunas, while the highest bidder offered 75 million. The building was gradually mortgaged between 5 October and 1 November 1991 in order to obtain a loan from the Česká státní spořitelna (savings bank) in the amount of 85 million korunas. The buyer used the loan to pay for the hotel, and repaid it along with other working capital loans in full by 2002.[5]

Throughout the 1990s, the hotel required no further investment as the building itself was fairly new. The customers were predominantly Germans from neighbouring Saxony, who regularly visited Ústí – especially for weekend shopping. Hotel Vladimir was often fully booked. Due to changing trends in international tourism, the company decided to modernise the building and adapt it to the needs of business customers.
To increase its prestige and publicise the hotel in the country, the owner joined forces with one of the largest international hotel chains. In 2004, the iconic "Vladimir" sign was replaced with the blue and yellow logo of Best Western.[6] After the merger, 90% of the rooms were redecorated, and the dark, custom-made furniture was discarded in favour of new furnishings made of light-coloured plywood. The main hall, the

1 R. Filipi, *80. léta v Ústí nad Labem: rozsáhlým demolicím mělo za oběť padnout téměř celé historické centrum města*, Českí rozhlas, 31.05.2023, https://sever.rozhlas.cz/80-leta-v-usti-nad-labem-rozsahlym-demolicim-melo-za-obet-padnout-temer-cele-9003930 (accessed: 7.06.2024).

2 Z. Mendlová, *Odstřel dvanácti historických domů před 40 lety změnil centrum Ústí*, iDNES.cz, 14.12.2019, https://www.idnes.cz/usti/zpravy/demolice-odstrel-usti-nad-labem-centrum-historicke-domy.A191207_519171_usti-zpravy_pakr (accessed: 7.06.2024).

3 R. Berger, Z. Havlík, *Hotel Vladimir v Ústí nad Labem*, "Architektura ČSR" 1988, 47/2, p. 52.

4 Ibid.

5 D. Pastva, *Rozvojové trendy Best Western Hotelu Vladimir Ústí nad Labem, diplomová práce*, Technická univerzita v Liberci, Hospodářská fakulta, 2005, pp. 24–25.

6 Ibid., pp. 12–13.

Free shop with clothes in the former panoramic cafe
Photo: Jana Pavlova

Ukrainian residents of the hotel cleaning up the public space in front of the building, 2023
Photo: archive of Karel Karika

reception and the restaurant were also modernised and adapted to the standards of congress tourism.[7] Under the Best Western brand, the Vladimir had been transformed into one of the most comfortable accommodation options in the district.

In 2007, CPI City Center began construction just opposite the Vladimir, on a site that had been vacant since the bombing raids of World War II. The new building complex included offices, a supermarket, smaller shops and service points, as well as a Clarion Congress Hotel, a competitor of the Vladimir. This hotel, which opened in 2011, dominated the local hotel scene and, as a result, its owners were soon able to buy its decaying neighbour in 2017. The Vladimir was stripped of one of its four stars but continued to operate as a cheaper part of the Clarion, without its own kitchen (and only offering breakfast). After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the new owner finally gave up on operating the almost abandoned hotel. Although the building was in good condition, it faced an uncertain future.

The hotel rooms stood empty, while at the same time there was a growing demand for affordable rental flats. More than 2.5 thousand apartments – most of the Ústí housing stock – were privatised after 1989 by CPI BYTY, a subsidiary of CPI City Center. By the end of 2010, the company dabbled in rent deregulation, with prices rising by up to 100% at times. As a result, many residents – especially senior citizens and welfare beneficiaries – were priced out and forced to move out of the city.[8] Some tenants sued CPI, demanding justification for the rent increases. In most cases, they argued that it was immoral to turn flats into a speculative commodity in order to make a profit. However, CPI BYTY was not interested in filling the void left by the defunct official social policy. The company's assets also included two night shelters in Ústí: Klíšská and Modrá. CPI terminated the lease agreements with their administrator, as a result of which many marginalised people lost the roof over their heads. Citizens who were discriminated against because of their ethnicity found it particularly difficult to find new

7 *Best Western Hotel Vladimir – Ústí nad Labem*, Atlas Česka, https://www.atlasceska.cz/ubytovani/best-western-hotel-vladimir-usti-nad-labem-26336 (accessed: 7.06.2024).

8 L. Chlebná, *Nájemci odmítli zdražení, firma vlastnící byty v Ústí na ně podala žalobu*, iDNES.cz, 22.04.2011, https://www.idnes.cz/usti/zpravy/najemci-odmitli-zdrazeni-firma-vlastnici-byty-v-usti-na-ne-podala-zalobu.A110422_1572175_usti-zpravy_oks (accessed: 7.06.2024).

accommodation at short notice and without the money for a deposit[9].

After the Russian attack on Ukraine, during the rapid influx of refugees, CPI Hotels did not hesitate to act. They reopened the Vladimir, this time for the purpose of humanitarian aid. Volhynian Czechs from Zhytomir region found a temporary home here. They were provided with more than 200 beds, as well as communal rooms and a kitchen. The costs of their accommodation and catering were until recently covered by CPI BYTY.[10] All this was done under an agreement with Asociace hotelů a restaurací (Association of Hotels and Restaurants), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in cooperation with volunteer associations and NGOs. The refugee centre at Hotel Vladimir was initially managed by the Dobrovolnické Centrum organisation from Ústí, and since spring 2022 it has been run by the Romano Jasnica and Československá Romská Unie organisations, and Karel Karika, the deputy mayor of the municipality of Ústí nad Labem-město.[11]

Karika has for years been involved in both political and activist work for the Roma and other socially and ethnically marginalised groups in the region. The PRO! Ústí movement emerged from his activist initiatives and helped him enter politics. As deputy mayor, Karika was instrumental in helping those affected by CPI BYTY's closure of the two Ústí night shelters. He found flats and emergency accommodation at his own expense and paid rent deposits for more than a hundred people who found themselves homeless and would otherwise have ended up on the streets. For his help, he received the František Kriegel Prize from the Karta 77 Foundation in 2019. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he did not hesitate to join forces with the CPI Property Group (despite their previous grievances) and use his skills to encourage citizens to volunteer and help Ukrainian refugees integrate into the city. Since then, he has opened a counselling centre in the former Hotel Vladimir and nicknamed the building "Volodymyr". The staff help Ukrainians to find work, obtain documents, fill out and submit applications for social benefits, register with a GP, but above all find accommodation. In this regard, the counselling centre works with the CPI BYTY company, which is willing to offer Ukrainian refugees a flat without a deposit, only with the guarantee that they will take care of the premises and pay rent regularly. "I have no reason to complain about CPI; they were more than accommodating towards us", assures Karika, who adds that he tries to separate activism and work, in his roles as both a politician and a city official. Although he has had many complaints about the CPI Property Group in Ústí nad Labem, he is positive about the help it has provided since the beginning of full-scale war in Ukraine.

With the help of Karika's organisation, a communal living model has been established in the hotel. It is based on voluntary work, but the residents and volunteers also organise leisure activities together. The hotel building did not require any adaptations as the rooms have for years been ready to welcome guests, therefore organising bedding was the only thing left to do. According to Karika, the biggest problems were the drains, which had not been used for a long time, the draughty windows, and the heat exchange station, which urgently needed repairing. All these defects were rectified relatively quickly. A furniture bank was opened in the former shisha bar on the ground floor; inside, Ukrainian refugees could get the furniture they needed for not only their hotel rooms, but also their new flats. "The hotel worked well as long-term accommodation, no heavy construction work was necessary", says Karika, pleased. He claims that because of its many benefits, the communal living model is ideal for long-term accommodation.

Entertainment activities take place in the former restaurant and congress hall, such as concerts by the 'hotel' band Dolja, women's meetings, and arts and crafts markets. There are several hobby groups, a film club and a few

9 G. Hauptvogelová, *Ústí nad Labem: Lidé z rušených ubytoven mají problém sehnat nové bydlení*, Českí rozhlas, 31.05.2018, https://sever.rozhlas.cz/usti-nad-labem-lide-z-rusenych-ubytoven-maji-problem-sehnat-nove-bydleni-7231835 (accessed: 7.06.2024).

10 J. Vorlíček, *Uprchlíci v ústeckém hotelu se zapojují do pomoci. Uklízí a překládají si*, ÚSTECKÝdeník.cz, 23.03.2022, https://ustecky.denik.cz/zpravy_region/uprchlici-ukrajina-usti-hotel-vladimir-2022032.html (accessed: 7.06.2024).

11 Jana Pavlova's interview with Karel Karika in Ústí nad Labem, 17.11.2023. All following quotes are from this interview.

Residents baking Christmas cakes together in the former restaurant's kitchen, 2023
Photo: archive of Karel Karika

language courses. The atrium used to be a place for romantic dinners under the stars, but today the residents use it to play badminton or do yoga. On the top floor, in the former viewing café, clothes swaps take place under the luxurious crystal chandeliers. Initially, the hotel employed a security guard, receptionists and a cook, but the latter's services were soon not needed. In the basement, where the hotel reception used to be, Ukrainian women meet to cook their favourite dishes together. There were minor conflicts at first, but Karika notes that the refugee community now functions almost like a family.

↘ The volunteers from his organisation help to collect rubbish in the city, but they also take part in excursions, for example to the zoo or simply out into nature. The community uses online networks to organise itself and makes its events accessible to the public.

"It is important to us that the hotel is seen as an open place. Anyone can take part in our activities", encourages Karika. "Everything works well, the people of Ústí are interested in what we do".

A lot has changed since the first refugees arrived in the city. Many Ukrainians have found work and new homes, while others have returned to their country. So, in summer 2023, CPI Hotels decided to make some rooms available to tourists again. They currently share the communal rooms with the refugees. Following changes to the Czech "Lex Ukrajina", some of the refugees have been obliged to pay a monthly rent of CZK 7.5 thousand since 1 July 2023.[12] Children of school age have received a new type of aid, this time from the Centropol company, which has provided CZK 10 million from its Energie Foundation to pay for school lunches. This is another targeted aid package that came from outside the state budget and addresses specific needs on the basis of a mutual agreement with the municipality or the NGO sector.[13]

The reopening of the Vladimir, this time for humanitarian purposes, gave this underutilised building a new purpose. The management of CPI Hotels declared their interest in financing the renovation of the hotel and keeping it as a cheap place to stay. At the moment, it is still unclear how the investor intends to approach the architectural heritage of the Vladimir. Which will win: the aesthetics, the will to preserve the hotel as an architectural monument that co-creates the cultural identity of Ústí nad Labem, or the ethics of offering an affordable form of accommodation? "It would be fantastic to look at the breathtaking panorama of the city from the café or relax in the cosy restaurant", dreams the receptionist, who has been working here since the refugees arrived. Some works of art remain in the communal areas and their fate will be decided during the future redesign. The renovation of the Ústí shopping and service centre requires careful treatment of the historic fabric, especially in the neglected public part, which is stylistically similar to the nearby apartment blocks. The general maintenance of the area is hampered by unresolved legal and ownership issues. The once modern infrastructure and residential centre of Ústí is slowly becoming infested with crime. Many of the city's residents still see the complex – and thus the Vladimir – as a symbol of the destructive socialist period in the city's history. a greater appreciation of the hotel's architecture would undoubtedly help to improve the quality of life in this central, lucrative neighbourhood. The refugee community is vocal in their support for the revitalisation of the neighbourhood and would gladly use the outdoor facilities near the hotel in the future.

TRANSLATED FROM POLISH BY
NATALIA RACZKOWSKA
TRANSLATED FROM CZECH TO POLISH BY
KATARZYNA DUDZIC-GRABIŃSKA

12 J. Balvín, *Uprchlíci uklízeli u Vladimiru. V ústeckém hotelu budou do konce války*, ÚSTECKÝdeník.cz, 3.08.2023, https://ustecky.denik.cz/zpravy_region/uprchlici-uklizeli-u-vladimiru-v-usteckem-hotelu-budou-do-konce-valky-20230803.html (accessed: 8.06.2024). In the fourth quarter of 2023 the average rent in the Czech Republic was 16,576 CZK (down by 4% quarter-to-quarter and year-to-year). As usual, rents were highest in Prague. *Průměrný nájem činil koncem loňska 16 576 korun*. Meziročně klesl o čtyři procenta, Forbes, 14.01.2024, https://forbes.cz/prumerny-najem-cinil-koncem-lonska-16-576-korun-mezirocne-klesl-o-ctyri-procenta/ (accessed: 7.06.2024).

13 Energie pomáhá foundation, http://energiepomaha.cz/o-nadacnim-fondu/2/2/0.

THE ARTIST AS NETWORK OPERATOR

On “Net Making” in the Ukrainian Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale

In 2024, it isn’t easy to perceive words like social network, web, internet, and even networking as something fresh and inspiring. At best, one uses them offhandedly; at worst, they recall the smell of dust wiped off an LCD screen with a dry cloth, or stacks of books by postmodernists and first-generation actor-network theorists. The pleasant intellectual itch they brought about is fast receding; the metaphor of the network no longer stirs the imagination.

TEXT

Borys Filonenko

Nonetheless, at the level of practices – as networks have grown domestic and part of the everyday – the very task of forming and manifesting connections proves not so obvious and contains considerable potential.

The notion that everything is related to everything else can lead to attempts to construct a model of total interdependence. Bruno Latour (to me a still-undusty theoretician and writer) anticipates these attempts:

> Is everything interrelated? Not necessarily. We don't know what is interconnected and woven together. We are feeling our way, experimenting, trying things out. Nobody knows of what an environment is capable[1].

Crisis states sharpen the eye for active network segments, temporary agents, and expressions of their interactions. The Russian war against Ukraine (and modern Ukrainian history in general) forces one to cultivate a discernment of crisis without reference to a conventional norm. Normality exists outside this context, hence a necessary note to this reflection is a precursory redefinition of a network theory axiom: something becomes visible precisely when it breaks or stops working. Here, the opposite is true: a complex and unexpectedly well-functioning system comes into focus. Maidan and grassroots initiatives, volunteer movements, Ukrzaliznytsia (Ukrainian Railways), postal services, the electronic banking system, stable cellular communication, etc. – all these are infrastructures of various types that provide resistance to military aggression and outline an image of a future Ukrainian society.

Max Gorbatskyi and Viktoria Bavykina, curators of the Ukrainian Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale, created a project at a unique moment in this history – a kind of crisis within a crisis. Even within Ukraine, the period of greatest support for Ukraine has passed; simultaneously, opportunities have emerged to contemplate this period from a temporal distance. The making of camouflage nets – a symbol of Ukrainian unity and resistance – is taken by the curators as the main metaphor: *net making*, where the net no longer has a strictly digital or analog form, becomes hybridized, and can unite four different artistic projects about language, memory, stereotypes, and the new commons.

Since the project's outset, Gorbatskyi and Bavykina have delineated the unique role of the artist as an agent who reveals the stories and voices of others. In the pavilion, Andriy Rachynskyi and Daniil Revkovskyi present a film assembled from found footage shot by eyewitnesses of the invasion; Katya Buchatska collects greetings in various mediums by neuroatypical artists with Down syndrome and artists with autism; Lia Dostlieva and Andrii Dostliev critique stereotypes about Ukrainian refugees in ten narrative video portraits; Oleksandr Burlaka creates an architectural form that gathers all these works into one comprehensive project. The artist acts as a mediator of social processes, a figure through whom entire bundles of relations and branches connecting various social groups become linked and visible. The Ukrainian Pavilion becomes a temporary site of expression for this plurality.

A POSTCARD FOR THE CHIEF CURATOR

Amidst the works of Katya Buchatska's "Best Wishes", I am thinking about how one's sensing of language changes when, for example, one's own name comes to you in the form of a giant éclair. Each letter is filled with custard cream and pieces of kiwi, sprinkled with powdered sugar, and all this is addressed directly to you with consideration and wishes for all the best. This is the éclair I see in Heorhii Alaverdov's video. He is preparing it for his friend Vitia. In Ukrainian, that makes four eclair letters. Nearby, I see postcards from Artem Oliinyk, among them a long wish for Heorhii Alaverdov: that he relax by the sea near Kherson and take many photographs of various colors. The number and colors of the photographs are determined according to the colors of cars

1 B. Latour, *To modernize or to ecologize? That's the question*, [in:] *Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millenium*, eds B.Braun, N. Castree, London–New York: Routledge, 1998, pp. 221–242.

owned by people he knows: "...to take you some 4 × bright orange photos just like Lesya Bayrak's bright orange Fiat, and to take you some 12 × bright white photos just like Kristina Shyurkute's bright white Renault", for example. These works bring me back to the materiality of words, their hidden filling and special surface; and paintings of tables, festive and laden with dishes, along with recipes separated into their ingredients; all these only strengthen the strange feeling that I, as a viewer, am also invited to festivities previously unknown to me. On a large carpet created using the tufting technique, Anna Sapon directly addresses the curator of the 60th Venice Biennale: "Adriano Pedrosa I congratulate you on the opening of la biennale doors // I hope you spend the exhibition day nicely". Will Pedrosa feel the same as I do, invited? And what might the Biennale's chief curator's response be? Does this address build a bridge of communication?

Two years ago in Venice, Buchatska made a series of photographs titled *i, c, m, e, a, k*. By the shore, with wooden letters from a letterpress set, she sequentially wrote several lines in the sand: "SOME JOURNALIST ASKED ME HOW MY ART PRACTICE CHANGED WITH A WAR", "?", "TODAY I BOUGHT WOODEN LETTERS", "IMAGES DON'T WORK ANYMORE", "WORDS TOO", "HTTLLYTXXBHQ", "M V WEL C", "DETI", "KPACA", "~~KPACA~~". Images and words, having lost their power, unsuccessfully reassembled into warning signs of human presence. In Ukrainian cities and villages, the word "DETI" (children) written in a visible place was supposed to prevent shelling of residential buildings and shelters with children. But despite attempts, even these short words did not work, were disregarded in the hour of war.

Since 2016, Katya Buchatska has been working with artists with autism at the "Workshop of Possibilities", which she cofounded in Kyiv with Olha Shyshlova. When the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia began, the workshop did not close, switching instead to daily operation. Previously weekly sessions were now daily 10 am video calls that marked the start of long days filled with the anxieties and losses caused by military aggression. Finding a daily routine in a crumbling world was one of the saving graces these interactions created. Simultaneously, Buchatska noticed paradoxes occurring in language. Oft-repeated, clichéd greetings on special days – which are necessary elements of social interactions and are often vacant of any additional meaning – were now perceived differently. In wartime, when wishes for the future are invariably accompanied by reflection

↙ View of the *Net Making* exhibition, Ukrainian Pavilion, 60. La Biennale di Venezia, 2024
Photo: Rob Battersby, courtesy of the Ukrainian Pavilion team

↓ Katya Buchatska, *Shchyri vitannya*, various media, 2023, Ukrainian Pavilion, 60. La Biennale di Venezia, 2024
Photo: Rob Battersby, courtesy of the Ukrainian Pavilion team

T: Borys Filonenko

on the very possibility of this future, and each new day's simple greeting feels festive, simple words regain their own weight. In "Best Wishes", Katya Buchatska shows the works of fifteen neuroatypical artists: those with whom she works in the "Workshop of Possibilities", and artists with Down syndrome from the "atelienormalno" studio, founded by Kateryna Libkind, Stanislav Turina and Valeriia Tarasenko in Kyiv in 2018. The sincerity of interactions in the workshops led Buchatska to a project about discovering the multitudinous possibilities of language in simple greetings. The Ukrainian Pavilion becomes a place of vitally intense greeting activity: an installation with postcards, drawings, diaries, video works, a carpet, a cushion, and Nastia Kravchuk's heart-ornamented mattress for sitting on the floor, which, among other things, Iryna Holoborodko wishes to wash with shower gel.

The war in these wishes sometimes emerges suddenly, sometimes escapes the attuned eye. In a cooking video, the artist Vlada Dyka prepares a chocolate sponge cake with cherries called "Bomb", shaped like an explosion crater. Oleksii Ovdiienko plays first-person shooters, but he uses his weapons as instruments to write words. In the middle of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone in the game S.T.A.L.K.E.R., the artist writes, with shots in the sand, "Greetings!"

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HORRORS

"Happy holiday, dear women!", an elderly woman says into the camera of her smartphone, lying in a dark bomb shelter in Izium on March 8, 2022, the day after the city was occupied by Russian forces. Before sending out her greetings for International Women's Day, she recited the poem "I Affirm Myself" by Pavlo Tychyna. All the shots in Daniil Revkovskyi's Andriy Rachynskyi's film "Civilians. Invasion" are footage found on social media, taken in extremely dangerous war-torn locations. This is raw, vernacular documentation of the first months of the full-scale invasion,

↘ filmed by people who were the first to encounter the new Russian aggression. Each separate fragment leaves one questioning: Who are the recipients of their messages? Who did the people in the frame or those behind the cellphone camera hope to reach?

How soon did these greetings from shelters become accessible to a wider audience? Where are these people now? It seems that, in at least two of the segments, the person behind the camera was killed. Smartphone pocket cameras, surveillance cameras, and dashcams on vehicles have become a sort of zoom lens from the global world into scenes of local action. That we can view this footage in the Ukrainian Pavilion means it was somehow transferred from phones onto other devices or, whenever the connection was restored, directly uploaded to the internet. Later, found by the artists, it became part of the greater narrative shown here.

Gathering material from open sources is one of the most distinctive methods in Revkovskyi's

Daniil Revkovskyi and Andriy Rachynskyi, *Tsyvil'ni. Vtorhnennya*, found footage film, 2023, Ukrainian Pavilion, 60. La Biennale di Venezia, 2024
Photo: Rob Battersby, courtesy of the Ukrainian Pavilion team

and Rachynskyi's artistic practices. The artists process large open-source databases, searching for videos and simultaneously using Google Maps, social networks, online archives, and hosting services that interconnect the locales of events and certain topics. For "Civilians. Invasion", they found and reviewed close to two thousand video recordings from Mariupol, Melitopol, Kherson, Kharkiv, Izium, and other cities, selecting about a tenth for their work.

↘ Revkovskyi and Rachynskyi assembled the film on the principle of associative montage: scene after scene, a picture of a world in ruins is extended with new motifs and details. From initial reactions to bombings, such as a landscape inhabited by children and animals gradually becoming desolate, through attempts to obtain and prepare food in critical situations, then to leave the occupied cities – to bombardments of new burials and old city cemeteries. The authors call their work an "encyclopedia of horrors".

Social network infrastructures allow these videos to be noticed; gathered together, they provide an opportunity to tune into the transformations of human language in the apocalypse. "Civilians. Invasion" offers an alternative perspective on war, distinct from news reports and television overviews, where instead of narrative or analytical commentary we hear a direct assessment of destruction at the moment of bombing; we see personal space delineated in life-and-death situations. The sun breaks through the black smoke of fires, and two friends behind the camera excitedly discuss the view. The camera moves in a circle: a man is filming a panorama of residential blocks; the buildings are scorched; beside them is a large crater; off-camera, a confident voice is reciting a prayer from the residents of Vuhledar to God. In another scene, a man flees from shelling along with a crowd of people. For a brief moment, he shifts the trembling camera from the street to his own face and says, "And that's how we live".

In the works of Revkovskyi and Rachynskyi, I constantly find myself in a split situation: I am both an observer of suffering and a viewer who reacts to certain details with laughter. Perhaps, in each work, the artists invoke a tone that divides the viewer's experience. Increasingly, after repeated viewings of the same scenes in the film, you find yourself not only empathizing but also memorizing the funny phrases that can be heard amidst total catastrophe. Daniil Revkovskyi knows the entire script of the 57-minute film by heart.

Among other things, the effect arises from the nature of the image. Once uploaded to a video hosting site, this footage enters the domain of war meme production. In another work, "Mickey Mouse's Steppe" (2023), Revkovskyi and Rachynskyi tell the story of tank battles in the 20th and 21st centuries. Combining a large photo archive with a narrative about a fictional archivist, these artists make visible the thesis that the territory of modern Ukraine is now the site of the highest concentration of tanks, both from World War II and the current Russian war against Ukraine. A unifying image that helps convey this research is a US army meme which called the Soviet tanks they damaged "Mickey Mouse" because their two open hatches formed a silhouette resembling this cartoon character.

TEN TYPES OF UKRAINIAN REFUGEES +1

Minnie Mouse's face can be seen on the younger girl's sweater; she is standing with her mother and sister onscreen in "Comfort Work", a project by Lia Dostlieva and Andrii Dostliev. On another screen next to them is a woman dressed in a random assortment of clothes. A silhouette of the Disney mouse is laid out in rhinestones on her too-big pom-pom hat. These are portraits of Ukrainian refugees. The first is "Type 2. Poor mother". The second is "Type 3. La Badante (caretaker for the elderly)". In 2023–2024, Dostlieva and Dostliev conducted a survey among EU and UK citizens about their perceptions of Ukrainian refugees. From these numerous interviews, the artists identified the ten most common stereotypes and wrote brief texts about each for a staged portrait photoshoot. The casting calls were intended for EU and UK actors, who were to play the types. Actor fees were paid for portraying these "comfortable refugees". Real Ukrainian refugees did not appear in the frame but served as consultants in the filming process.

At the public talk "Sailing Through Storms: Art's Response to Crisis", held as part of the opening program of the Ukrainian Pavilion, Lia Dostlieva spoke about her personal experience under the particular lens of an external gaze. Often, this narrow framing defines her as an artist from Ukraine whose works represent the Ukrainian position on the current agenda. The discussion also problematized the asymmetry of relations in international dialogue: even after two years of full-scale war, not to mention

T: Borys Filonenko

View of the *Net Making* exhibition, Ukrainian Pavilion, 60. La Biennale di Venezia, 2024
Photo: Rob Battersby, courtesy of the Ukrainian Pavilion team

Andriy Dostliev, Lia Dostlieva, *Comfort Work*, video stills, 2023–2024, Ukrainian Pavilion, 60. La Biennale di Venezia, 2024
Photo: Rob Battersby, courtesy of the Ukrainian Pavilion team

after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, basic concepts about modern Ukraine have not been comprehended, and the context has not been studied by most Western colleagues.

↘ The field of stereotypes – sown by agents with a Russia-centric view of the Eastern European region as a territory of their own influence – remains the working perspective for viewing these countries as non-subjective entities.

In 2022, when formulas of Russian propaganda were used in questions addressed to members of the Ukrainian Pavilion, this seemed to be a problem solvable through productive direct interaction. Yet, two years later, questions about "NATO bases" and "rising levels of nationalism in contemporary Ukraine" return anew without substantial changes and are revealed as critically understudied. In a series of questions to the speakers, the head of a respected Spanish institution used similar formulations. When asked for clarification on what exactly was meant, she paused and agreed that she needed to give thought to more-precise characteristics.

When noticed, stereotypes become subject to critical rethinking and facilitate mutual understanding, provided that all parties make an effort. However, in reality, these efforts can rarely coincide, while conversation and reasoning require generalization. One side may even find itself silent. Lia Dostlieva and Andrii Dostliev emphasize this particularly: the Ukrainian Pavilion's "Comfort Work" is the only work in which people don't speak.

Looking at the video portraits reminds me of the film *Green Border* by Polish director Agnieszka Holland. This drama, which won a special prize at the 2023 Venice Film Festival, tells the tragic stories of refugees from Syria and Afghanistan who are stuck in the circle of hell

that is the Belarusian–Polish border. Border guards from two different countries take turns handling the bodies of Syrians and Afghanis to either create or solve the migration crisis, sometimes literally throwing bodies across barbed wire. At the end of the film – which is attentive to combating stereotypes about people from the East and Africa fleeing the war – Holland adds an epilogue. The year is 2022, Ukrainians are crossing the Polish border during Russia's full-scale invasion, and the Poles happily welcome them. Russia – the country waging war in both Ukraine and Syria, and which has diplomatic ties to the current Afghan leadership – is not mentioned. a film that allows the audience to engage with human stories suddenly employs a didactic figure of comparison of experiences in order to enhance the author's statement. This could be the eleventh type of silent refugee instrumentalized by European cinema.

"Comfort Work" is a kind of system of mirrors in which Ukrainians always appear as the other. From five screens, European actors portraying Ukrainians look out at the viewers of an international exhibition coming from various global contexts. They can temporarily contemplate Ukraine without the Ukrainians' direct participation.

THE POLISH PAVILION

Real Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons are the protagonists of the work "Repeat After Me" by Open Group (Yuriy Biley, Pavlo Kovach, Anton Varga), which represents the Polish Pavilion at the 60th Venice Biennale. Two large screens show films shot in 2022 in a modular town in Lviv, and in American and European cities in 2024. The work operates on the principle of educational karaoke: people briefly talk about themselves and invite viewers to repeat the sounds of weapons they heard in the cities they were forced to leave. Open mics allow visitors to reproduce the sounds of air raids, air raid alarms, mortar shelling, ballistic missiles, tanks, and helicopters right in the Pavilion, together with the people onscreen.

"Repeat After Me" is about the need to simplify language in order to convey knowledge that can save lives. Reduced to sounds, such language forms a hybrid of human and weapon. Since most sounds are difficult to convey, the entire human body works to successfully perform them. Valeriy's (Kyiv) whistle and Kateryna's (Kherson) howl require effort. "Bumbum Wom Wom Womwom Wombum", says Galyna, who left Ukraine for a refugee camp in Berlin; "Repeat after me. Bumbum Wom Wom Womwom Wombum…"

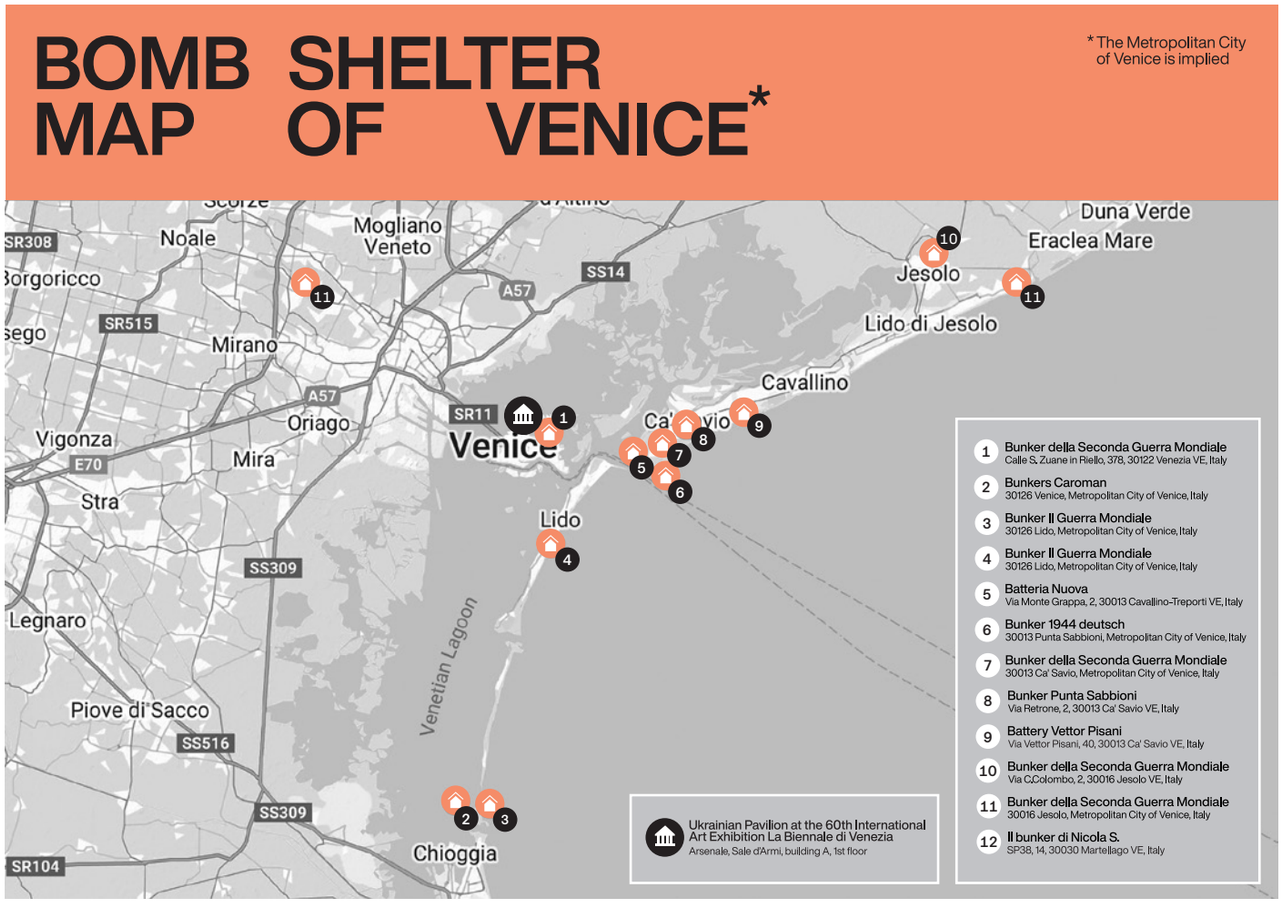
In his lectures on literature and the carpet bombings of German cities during World War II, W.G. Sebald examined various literary strategies for conveying the experience of being bombed. His analysis places at opposite poles the attempts of avant-garde prose and a document with results from pathological studies. In the textural description, full of assonance and alliteration that aim to convey to readers the musical rhythms of bombardment, Sebald finds nothing but the creative persona of the author. Meanwhile, the structured professional language of a doctor tells about the real horror of the air raid. "Repeat After Me" falls in between these discourses. The reproduction of sounds may resemble the declamation of futuristic poetry, but together with the disordered fragments of personal stories they create a space that brings viewers closer to the event. Karaoke, encyclopedic references about each type of weapon, and abbreviated stories of escape from fire and life in refugee hotels combine to form a single experience. The second film from 2024, in which the characters' stories are longer and more nuanced, especially evokes an emotional reaction in many visitors to the Pavilion.

What could be the consequences of interacting with this work? Will the knowledge gained in this training be of use to those who came to empathize? Anastasia transmits the sounds of a missile attack warning: "Ooooooo Eeeeeee. Ooooooo Eeeeeeee. Take shelter". But in Venice in the spring of 2024, no one is in the habit of going down to bomb shelters.

"CLOSED FOREVER" AND NEW HORIZONS

There is only one bunker on the island of Venice. It is a one-minute walk from the Ukrainian Pavilion, literally in the backyard of Arsenal Building A. On the island of Lido, where most of the project's team and participants are staying, a World War II bomb shelter is marked on Google Maps as "closed forever". Besides this, I see ten other shelters in the Venice municipality; they are listed on the "Bomb Shelter Map of Venice" brochure, developed as a handout for the Pavilion by the agency Bickerstaff.734. The map takes me outside and extends the bounds of Ukraine's presence at this year's Biennale, but to be inside the Pavilion is also to occupy a location in space that is relatively safer than any other in today's Venice.

The space of the Ukrainian Pavilion, relatively small within the context of this international event, receives special organizational treatment in the "Net Making" project. Oleksandr Burlaka has assembled his "Work" installation using homespun fabrics, which, as the artist himself describes, are "the last link in the traditional home production of flax and hemp. The days and hours spent in repetitive work were the formalization of hope for the future and care for the ones who will live after". This is handmade material from the 1950s and 1960s which Burlaka collected through the online marketplace OLX from cities across nearly all regions of Ukraine. Burlaka also altered the usage scenarios of what is essentially a transit room, which has six exits in all directions and two large windows. His installation has an elliptical shape and transforms the space into a self-contained and cozy environment for each of the artworks and anyone inside. At the official opening, the crowded Pavilion became a gathering place that reminded some of the times of the veche at Maidan (likely due to the cramped space and emotion of the moment); others spoke of the



Bomb Shelter Map of Venice, part of the Bickerstaff.623 promotional campaign for the Ukrainian Pavilion at the 60. La Biennale di Venezia

uniqueness of this meeting: for three years now, members of Ukrainian artistic communities have been living through very different life and professional experiences, and this social sculpture in this particular configuration might not occur again.

Put together, all the works in the Pavilion unfold into their own specific versions of the unifying metaphor of net weaving as a new commons. Nets are woven, but these are camouflage nets. Making them is about connections, but they also cover something important and valuable – they hide it. After spending time inside "Net Making", questions arise not only about the future direction of movement from the Pavilion (through the six alternative exits to a peaceful Venetian sky, or to the nearby and only bomb shelter), but also about the vector of this complex and polyphonic statement. Does this exhibition sum up the first years of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine? Is it a micro-model of possible future social manifestations within sustainable infrastructures, to which artists now contribute as network operators?

T: Borys Filonenko

Human interactions precede any established forms of such systems. The Ukrainian project's artists simultaneously express the significance of the communities they work with and also point to various kinds of lack: an inclusive politics and organization of urban space in modern Ukraine; attention to personal war stories that are lost among official news; the feeling of being an interlocutor who deserves a point of view or a story that can be heard.

In the opening days, the title of the 60th Venice Biennale, "Foreigners Everywhere", could be heard playfully altered: "Queues Everywhere", "Seagulls Everywhere", "Russians Everywhere", "War Everywhere". Remaining steadfast, perhaps camouflaged, was the word "Everywhere". Is this word truly so indispensable and comprehensible? If the flexible use of the word foreigner allows us to see other things and phenomena everywhere along with it – to freely substitute it depending on circumstance – then is there nothing left to sub for Everywhere? Or, rather, do many specific places remain where neither a foreigner nor an imaginary local dares to go? "Green borders", demarcation lines, conflict zones, social tensions, destroyed infrastructure, undeveloped inclusive spaces – crisis territories of sorts that may remain unvisited by those joining a world titled "Foreigners Everywhere". Everywhere, yet somehow not.

Artists often move towards these places. As the Kyiv painter Tiberiy Szilvashi wrote: "Art deals with the development of unsettled territories"[2]. And there are many spaces yet beyond the horizon of today's Everywhere.

TRANSLATED FROM UKRAINIAN BY LISA BILETSKA

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2 T. Szilvashi, *Obyekt, objekt, language and vision*, [in:] T. Szilvashi, *Derevo Odisseya: Esseyi, texty, foto*, Kyiv: Arthuss, 2020, p. 79.

→ Arrival of people with disabilities at the Main Railway Station in Lviv, 5 March 2022
Photo: Roman Baluk, Urban Media Archive, Centre for Urban History

Let's transform

REHABILITATION IN UKRAINE

Rehabilitation and support for people with disabilities have become crucial in wartime conditions. Preliminary estimates suggest that there will be up to five million veterans in Ukraine as a result of the war, many of whom will be people with acquired disabilities, including military servicepeople wounded in combat, and civilian victims of Russian military aggression.

TEXT

Valentyna Shevchenko

Since the earliest days of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, regions not adjacent to the frontline have become transit and rehabilitation centres. In the first months of the war, five million Ukrainians travelled through Lviv alone[1], some of whom found refuge in Lviv oblast. To this day, this city continues to take in the gravely ill, the severely wounded, people with limited mobility who have been evacuated from the areas of hostilities, as well as people and children with mental disorders and disabilities. Specialized medical facilities continue to provide treatment and rehabilitation for Ukrainian fighters.

At the same time, analysis of media reports and interviews with activists[2] suggest that the national (and international) public has a distorted understanding of what the field of rehabilitation entails. Today, under the conditions of war, many people have come to associate "rehabilitation" exclusively with the treatment and recovery of military servicepeople and veterans, mostly men, who have acquired a disability. An activist from Lviv notes that "the community is increasingly saying that there will be more people with disabilities… that the perception of disability in the country will shift. But, so far, we have only seen attitudes change towards people – specifically men – who have served in the military. When we speak of disability, people forget that there are also women with disabilities, civilians with disabilities, people whose disability is not a result of the war, those who had disabilities prior to the war, and people with congenital rather than acquired disabilities. There aren't many conversations among us about the range of disability as such" (woman, recorded in Lviv, 2023).

However, rehabilitation is limited not only to specific groups of people or to the actions that are taken to help them physically or mentally recover. It is a complex, multi-component system that is currently undergoing radical transformation in Ukraine, often with the active involvement of civic society. The range of actors involved in the rehabilitation of different population groups is quite wide. These include non-governmental organizations and charities that focus on social projects that aim to restore support for civilians and servicepersons who have suffered as a result of the military aggression, including children who have lost one or both parents in the war. Initiatives within this movement were started by activists from various human rights organizations, religious denominations, members of travel and athletic clubs, etc. Through the use of various practices – medical, psychological, advocacy, educational, artistic or athletic – the civic sector influences the creation of new approaches to the system of rehabilitation in Ukraine, prompting a rethinking of urban space and infrastructure.

This publication is not intended to provide an exhaustive study of all the changes taking place in Ukraine with regard to rehabilitation and accessibility. Rather, it is an attempt to indicate, using several case studies, the directions of changes in the field and NGOs' and charity organizations' influence on the process.

RESCUE

With the start of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24 2022, the lives of Ukrainians came under threat. Millions of people were forced to leave their homes and seek shelter from the war in safe places both inside and outside the country. In conditions of acute mass stress and panic, the road to safety was difficult even for able-bodied people, not to mention those with limited mobility and disabilities. Their vulnerability has increased manifold under wartime conditions for a number of reasons, the leading among them being lack of information, inaccessibility of shelters, and the need for outside assistance[3]. As the state proved to be insufficiently prepared for the scale of displacement of people in general, and people with limited mobility in particular, during the initial stages of the military aggression, evacuation was only possible in

1 *2022 rik – pidsumky*, Lwiwśka miśka rada, 30.12.2022, https://city-adm.lviv.ua/news/government/296083-2022-rik-pidsumky (accessed: 10.04.2024).

2 The article is based on the interviews recorded by the author personally within the framework of the project "Networks of Support" implemented by the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning (Warsaw, Poland) in cooperation with the Centre for Urban History (Lviv, Ukraine); as well as one interview recorded within the project "24.02.22, 5 am: Testimonies from the War" in cooperation with the Centre for Urban History and the Research Centre for Contemporary History in Hamburg (https://www.lvivcenter.org/en/researches/oral-testimonies-from-the-war-2/).

3 Zaremba-Kosovych, H. *Invalidnist ta viina: Analitychnyi zvit za rezultatamy doslidzhennia*. Hromadska orhanizatsiia liudei z invalidnistiu "Fight for Right/Borotba za prava" (Kyiv, 2022, p. 8).

many regions thanks to the involvement of volunteers and NGOs, who reformatted their work towards emergency response and rescue. As a survey conducted by the organization Fight for Right shows, NGO representatives had varying levels of experience in working with authorities in the process of evacuation, ranging from none to close cooperation[4]. Fight for Right – a Ukrainian NGO for people with disabilities, founded in 2017 – became one of the first to respond to the evacuation needs of people with disabilities. As early as Februar 26, 2022, they managed to evacuate a family with five children from the town of Pryluky in the Chernihiv oblast to Ivano-Frankivsk in western Ukraine, and between 3 and 5 March they carried out the first medical evacuation (transportation of a severely ill person using specialized medical transport) from Brovary to Lviv[5]. This was followed by numerous group and individual evacuations of people with various types of disabilities. Between February and October 2022, Fight for Right provided assistance to more than 5 thousand people with disabilities. The longest evacuation lasted 17 days and covered five countries. Most people were evacuated from Donetsk, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts[6].

In addition to Fight for Right, many other NGOs and volunteers were involved in the evacuation of people with disabilities, making various efforts to keep people safe. The biggest challenge was organizing evacuation from frontline-adjacent and occupied territories.

At the same time, constant assistance was brought to people with disabilities, providing them with medication, food, necessary hygiene and auxiliary supplies, organizing rehabilitation, treatment, psychological, legal and financial support, as well as accompanying them in crossing the border.

In the process of evacuating people with disabilities, Ukrainian civic initiatives and volunteers received significant support from foreign and international organizations. In many cases these swift interactions were made possible through personal contacts or acquaintances, as well as through a history of previous cooperation in various projects and programs. One board member of a charity foundation in Germany recalled that "Since around 2016, one of the directions of our work has been to help people with disabilities in Ukraine…

> ↘ On [February]… 28th, I received a message from one of my contacts – a mother of a girl with a difficult disability, from Cherkasy – telling me they had managed to leave the city… The next evening, me and my husband, just back from his shift, drove to the Polish border to pick them up…

I bring up these personal contacts with people we supported because… of course we were the ones they reached out to on their way to Germany and my private phone number was immediately shared all over. My phone wouldn't stop ringing. I was constantly on the phone, navigating, [coordinating] people with each other. Later, of course I'd get calls and messages from not only refugees with disabilities but also people from outside the community fleeing in panic" (woman, recorded in Hamburg, 2023).

As a result of this joint emergency response from Ukrainian and foreign NGOs, thousands of people with disabilities have managed to find refuge in other countries: not only in Europe, but also in North and South America.

↗ Pidzamche railway station, severely wounded civilians boarding the evacuation train, Lviv, 10 April 2022
Photo: Roman Baluk, Urban Media Archive, Centre for Urban History

→ Refugees gathering at the Main Railway Staion, Lviv, 5 March 2022
Photo: Roman Baluk, Urban Media Archive, Centre for Urban History

4 For more, see: Salakhova, Ya. *24.02: Evakuatsiia liudei z invalidnistiu: Analitychnyi zvit*. Hromadska orhanizatsiia liudei z invalidnistiu "Fight for Right/Borotba za prava" (Kyiv, 2022, pp. 35–38).

5 Fight for Right. The year of full-scale Russia's war against Ukraine. https://ffr.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FIGHT_FOR_RIGHT_ZVIT_2022_ENG.pdf.

6 See: Salakhova, Ya., 2022.

7 https://minre.gov.ua/2023/09/22/v-ukrayini-nalichuyetsya-3-miljony-ly-udej-z-invalidnistyu/.

T: Valentyna Shevchenko

RECOVERY AND ADAPTATION

As the number of people, military and civilian, affected by the full-scale invasion since February 24, 2022 rapidly increased, the questions of rebuilding existing rehabilitation facilities, creating new ones, and introducing cutting-edge methods and technologies arose with great urgency. After all, according to official (and far from complete) data, after 18 months of war (as of September 2023) the number of people with disabilities in Ukraine has increased by 300 thousand[7]. As Russia continues its military aggression and settlements in different corners of the country (especially in frontline-adjacent areas) suffer from daily artillery shelling, air strikes, missile and drone attacks, while the military staunchly defends the state on the battlefield, the number of wounded, injured and traumatized people continues to rise.

Two major centres built in Lviv – the "Unbroken" National Rehabilitation Center and the "Superhumans" Center for Prosthetics, Reconstructive Surgery, Rehabilitation and Psychological Support of the Victims of War – are leading the way in implementing innovations and modern standards, as well as driving policy change in the field of rehabilitation. Aside from these two, there are dozens of other institutions that are less visible in the media but no less effective in implementing evidence-based modern tools and practices. Nevertheless, such facilities remain a critical need. There is a profound need for rehabilitation professionals as well as various centres and departments that would help people regain their physical, mental and social functionality.

NGOs and charities support the establishment or upgrading of such facilities in various ways and to varying degrees. Typically, this involves helping existing medical establishments with repairs, purchasing needed furniture, equipment, etc., resulting in improved and

rethought spaces. For example, the Malteser Relief Service, which began its work in Ukraine in 1990, has been involved in the reconstruction of spaces in two hospitals. Their support has enabled the Okhmatdyt Lviv hospital to set up a sensory-motor development room in the Rehabilitation Clinic and purchase proper up-to-date equipment and materials for the psychologist's office[8]. Likewise, in order to improve the emotional well-being of patients affected by the war, the Feofaniya Clinical Hospital in Kyiv opened a recreation centre. "This means creating spaces where people can come and take a break from the hospital setting", said Olha Lekh, head of the public outreach department of the Malteser Relief Service in Lviv. "They have… a play area, you can read books, watch a movie, or listen to music, just talk to someone, or have a cup of tea or coffee. There is a social worker who can help them resolve problems with documents or other social issues. And there is always a psychologist" (recorded in Lviv, 2024). All the efforts of this kind are aimed at giving children and adults the opportunity to regain their physical and psychoemotional resources and improve their quality of life in appropriate, comfortable conditions.

At the same time, civic-mindedness and the desire to be of use to those affected by war-related trauma are driving activists to organize rehabilitation spaces in unexpected locations. For example, the charity foundation I Can You Can, which cares for children and adults with disabilities, people with limited mobility and the elderly, intends to set up the "Tree of Life" rehabilitation centre in a space located on the ground-floor of an Orthodox Church in Ivano-Frankivsk[9].

Cooperation between activists, treatment and rehabilitation initiatives, as well as international organizations has resulted in the creation of specialized facilities for social rehabilitation. One such place is Ukraine's first Habilitation Center for Veterans and Civilians Affected by Hostilities, which recently opened in Lviv. The term "Habilitation" in the Center's name stands for a system of services aimed at acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary for independence in a social environment: understanding one's capabilities and limitations, social roles, rights and responsibilities, the ability to take care of one's own needs. This new centre is a place where veterans and civilians will be taught new skills and how to adapt to daily life. This centre is run by an activist and veteran of the Russian–Ukrainian war, psychologist Serhii Titarenko, who has first-hand experience of being in the military, being wounded and disabled, and getting around in a wheelchair. Titarenko also understands the principle of peer-to-peer: "In the rehabilitation department of the hospital… they taught me to use the wheelchair… and then they discharged me. I had no idea where I should go or what I should do. I was one of the first severely wounded people, and one of the first to receive the new status of veteran. None of us realized what we were coming back to. My house was not adapted to a wheelchair, so I couldn't grasp how to live with all of this", Serhii recalls. "Since the start of the full-scale invasion, so many people have been severely wounded that amputations are now the order of the day. And that's before you even think of the neurological trauma or head injuries. So, it's really those who, for the most part, can't manage on their own, especially in our non-inclusive society. And you have to make that transition – that bridge from a treatment and rehabilitation facility to the community, to society. At the moment, this bridge is more like a chasm. This is why we decided to build this team" (recorded in Lviv, 2024).

"This place will be as inclusive as possible, both for living and working. But we can't fully hand-hold and babysit them… Our approach is minimalist but precise so as to give our respondents the idea that they can take care of themselves and organize their homes in a similar fashion to our centre – or even better – and to accommodate their basic inclusion needs. …Our goal in the habilitation process itself is to get the veterans to take responsibility for their own lives from the moment they cross the threshold of our centre, even from the moment the possibility of coming here occurs to them", Titarenko adds.

At the same time, the Center sees its mission not only in teaching veterans self-reliance but also in providing them with the kind of knowledge that will help them realize that they can be a force for change, that they can be useful not only on the battlefield but also in civilian life; in preparing them for dedicated, socially meaningful work in the hromadas to which they will return.

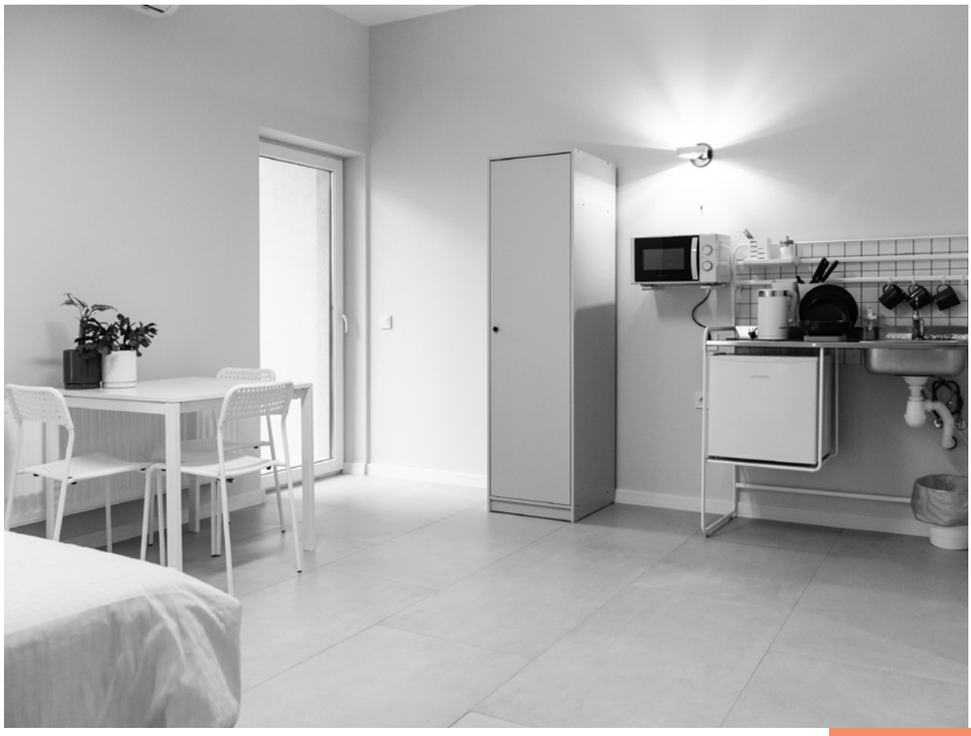
8 https://malteser.ua/2023/12/06/dopomoga-okhmatdytu/.

9 https://icanyoucan.org.ua/rehabilitation.

↘ When talking about the reintegration of veterans, the adaptation course and the establishment of the habilitation centre, Titarenko emphasizes that veterans, especially disabled ones, need respect and support. Exaggerated pathos and excessive care should be avoided as they can only exacerbate the situation.

COMMUNICATION

The COVID-19 pandemic not only cost millions of lives but also disrupted the daily existence of many people and restricted their normal practices and communication channels. At the same time, there are many people whose communication with their environment is impaired due to congenital or acquired speech and language disorders. According to researchers, the number of such people is increasing worldwide every year. The full-scale Russian invasion has further complicated this situation in Ukraine. Traumatizing events increase people's vulnerability to psychosocial stress, as has been reflected in, among other things, an increase in cases of abnormal behaviour or greater difficulties in social interactions, in both children and adults.



Habilitation Centre in Lviv
Photo: courtesy of the Habilitation Centre in Lviv

> This particularly affects people with autism, psychoemotional disorders, intellectual disabilities, etc., who have become even more anxious, sensitive and cautious when communicating with strangers.

Habilitation Centre in Lviv
Photo: courtesy of the Habilitation Centre in Lviv

It is crucial that these people find an environment in which they experience positive attitudes and safety, especially when socializing. "When we joined the project, we were a completely new team; our friends (i.e., the people receiving services) did not know us", said the leader of one of the centres for children and youth with special needs in Lviv. "...So we faced some challenges... we had to learn to work with them. One of the biggest [problems] is the air raid alerts. Our friends get very anxious, so these conditions are especially stressful for them... Of course, in the times we live it is difficult for them to be calm. When there's an air raid alert in the morning, it's very hard for us to gather them here. They don't want to leave their homes. And, of course, when there's an air raid alert, we need to be in

a shelter. They do not like that either… people with such diagnoses want stability and order" (woman, recorded in Lviv, 2024).

Of course, even before the war, there were centres in Ukraine for skills development, social adaptation and recreation for people with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities. However, the full-scale invasion forced many of them to rethink their methods and forms of activity. The threat to life – the destruction of buildings and critical infrastructure by the constant missile strikes on Ukrainian territory – has prompted these centres to pay more attention to practical work and teaching key self-care skills, such as personal hygiene, cooking, eating in public places, remembering the address of their residence, as well as various physical and psychological rehabilitation procedures. To a large extent, these initiatives can only be carried out thanks to support from grants and donors. In 2023, for example, the Caritas Lviv UGCC foundation received a grant for the implementation of the project "Support for children and adults with disabilities in an emergency response in eight locations in Ukraine"[10], which enabled them to organize additional training sessions with a speech therapist and a rehabilitation therapist, as well as consultations with a psychologist. This brought their services not only to local residents but also to numerous internally displaced persons who needed such help. Unfortunately, projects of this kind are only temporary, while people with communication disorders require long-term support.

Founders of the "Hovory!" ("Talk!") NGO have also set themselves the goal of advocating for people with disorders and disabilities in Ukraine by providing them with access to technology to improve their lives and social engagement. This organization began its work by adapting and localizing the Tippy Talk app for Ukrainian speakers. This app became one of the first digital tools of alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) in the Ukrainian language. It enables people of different age groups with communication disorders to express themselves and communicate with people, both live and at a distance, giving them greater social autonomy. Over the course of 2023, "Hovory!" managed to make the app available to 2.5 thousand users (initiatives and families that request it) and organize training on the use of Tippy Talk for speech professionals, doctors, educators, social workers, veterans, and families of people with disabilities. Considering the ever-growing number of people (especially soldiers and veterans of the Russian–Ukrainian war) who have developed speech disorders as a result of strokes, diseases, craniocerebral and mine trauma, the app can support more-effective treatment for them and facilitate their reintegration into society. This is seen in cases of the successful use of the Tippy Talk app by some hospitals and rehabilitation centres in communicating with non-verbal military personnel in the course of their recovery[11]. However, the IT specialists from Lviv did not stop there. They analysed the current needs of society and developed a new AAC app called "Ya kazhu" ("I say") with the company Harmonic Advance.

Additionally, "Hovory!" has been working with Genote Inc. since 2022 to acquire free licenses for the use of the Genote music therapy tool in the rehabilitation of military personnel, and to adapt it for Ukrainian users in order to popularize it as a means of supporting mental health[12].

10 http://caritas-lviv.org/2023/03/14/pochatok-novogo-proyektu-pidtrimka-ditey-ta-lyudey-z-invalidnistyu-pid-chas-krizovogo-reaguvannya-u-8-lokatsiyah-ukrayini/.

11 https://www.instagram.com/reel/C3ve4-ANHW3/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==.

12 For more, see: URL: https://www.talk.org.ua/en/home.

Recreation centre at the Feofaniya Clinical Hospital in Kyiv
Photo: Malteser Ukraine

T: Valentyna Shevchenko

INCLUSION

In their work today, particularly in the field of rehabilitation, NGOs and charities in Ukraine face various problems and challenges, of which there are far too many to comprehensively analyse and characterize in a single article. For this reason, I will limit my considerations to the one problem that is most emphasized by activists in the media and in personal interviews: the problem of inclusion. Most activists agree that despite the fact that accessibility and inclusion legislation and programs that would ensure equal access to education, services, and public spaces have been in place for two decades, and despite the simple steps towards their implementation, Ukrainian society as a whole is still not very inclusive in many regards. When discussing urban infrastructure, the activists note that there are some visible changes, such as lower kerbs at crosswalks, ramps, platform lifts, path paving, and tactile tiles. However, they also point out that due to the unscrupulousness of contractors or for other reasons, these "improvements" are often carried out without adhering to official building standards and therefore sometimes actually aggravate movement through the city for the people they are supposed to help. Although the number of low-floor public transport vehicles in cities continues to increase, drivers are sometimes not trained in how to properly serve low-mobility passengers and do not know how to park, raise and extend the ramp, or assist a person in a wheelchair.

Making public space and services accessible to all population groups in Ukraine was already a difficult task in peacetime and has become critically important in the conditions of the full-scale Russian aggression. Activists increasingly raise the question of the need for greater efforts in extending inclusion to invisible war-related traumas, especially mental disorders, which are widespread. "So that something like a drying machine in a public laundry doesn't trigger a panic attack", said a representative of one initiative; "These sorts of psychological traumas will make themselves felt. That's the first spatial and urban planning concern; another one is that we need to learn to give psychological first aid to ourselves and others because

> ↘ I think this will be an issue for a long time, and we will see this in our surroundings; so we can understand that something is going on with a person, for example as a result of a loud sound we know how to comport ourselves and what to do in those situations" (woman, recorded in Lviv, 2024).

Other factors that hinder the growth of an accessible Ukraine, according to these activists, are stereotypes, the lack of awareness of the need for inclusivity, and the ethics of interacting with people with disabilities, military personnel, and war veterans, as well as insufficient knowledge of how to support people with limited mobility.

Among other reasons brought to light by the war is the low priority given to inclusion. Ukrainian society continues to discuss the need to improve the accessibility of outdoor spaces for people with disabilities. Some citizens believe there are more important concerns and that it makes sense to allocate state and municipal resources to the needs of the army and the frontline. However, many experts on rehabilitation and social integration, as well as many disability activists, say that this attitude may lead to social disaster in the near future. Exclusion of people with disability, including war veterans, from social life as a result of inaccessibility threatens to not only waste the potential of talented individuals, but also to significantly increase deviant behaviour. "You can put life on pause… and 'tighten your belt' for a bit, as they say, and somehow keep your head above water… But life goes on every day. And we have been hearing this 'now's not the time' attitude for a decade. If we wait any longer, there won't be anyone left to do it for. Meanwhile, the number of people with wound-related limited mobility keeps growing. I think it is high time", says the founder of one NGO (man, recorded in Lviv, 2024).

The civic and charity sector is not only uncovering and publicizing problems in the areas of rehabilitation and inclusion but is also looking for solutions. Many activists and experts cite as an optimal step a significant increase in the amount of social advertising and educational initiatives that need to be implemented at the local, regional and national levels. At the same time, despite the existing competition for donor support, representatives of NGOs and charities are aware that attaining the desired result – an effective rehabilitation system and an inclusive environment for a fulfilling and dignified life for every member of Ukrainian society – can only be achieved through productive cooperation between all stakeholders.

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The COURAGE of Ukrainian volunteers is admirable

Šárka Svobodová

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Polina Davydenko

It's a few minutes past midday. The summer heat is still in the air and the inhabitants seek any kind of protection from the sweltering sun. The miners hurry to their shift. To catch the slightest bit of shade, they walk along the buildings and walls until they disappear in the darkness of the shaft. The Donbas is unbearable in summer and no better in winter. The mining town of Dobropillia is 40 kilometres away from the nearest frontline.

You see war at a glance, but these are not images we associate with war. There are no burnt cars, corpses, and destroyed houses. You can feel the war in the details of everyday life. The last missile hit the town a year ago, but explosions are a daily occurrence in the outskirts. People still feel safe, until the sounds of explosions come closer and warplanes fly over their heads. At these moments, people pause and listen to how close the enemy has struck.

The article is illustrated with photographs by Polina Davydenko (originally in colour)

← The slogan "Look around" was painted on the facade of a block of flats in Dobropillia. With each passing year, it gains a new meaning

ŠÁRKA SVOBODOVÁ:

I assume there are complex reasons for your return to your hometown during the war, both personal and from an artist's perspective.

POLINA DAVYDENKO:

I spent the first six years of my life in Dobropillia and have returned every year since we moved away – usually for the summer. I decided to return this time because I felt a sense of responsibility, almost a duty, to tell the truth about everyday life during the war. I believe that the ubiquitous media images distort the reality of war. Damaged infrastructure, burnt houses, and casualties are all part of it, but the hostilities have a constant impact on everyday life in the affected regions. The initial shock usually passes, and people have to start functioning again, get back to work, and send their children to school.

I wanted to show that Ukrainians are not sitting around in shelters or basements waiting for humanitarian aid. I had to counter this narrative. People are active, the war is making them work more than before. It seems as if everyone has aged five or ten years in this short period of time.

I also chose Dobropillia because it is an important centre for refugees. The city centre was last shelled a year ago and is therefore considered the safest place in Donetsk Oblast, even though missiles regularly strike just a few kilometres away and the frontline is very close. The refugee crisis and its consequences are not only limited to abroad: there is also internal migration and refugees move to other

cities or oblasts. Many people from Bakhmut, Kostiatynivka, Kharkiv and other shelled cities have come to Dobropillia.

ŠS: **Working on a documentary or artistic photography series during the war is very demanding, and it will then be scrutinised by the relevant accreditation bodies. Did you know in advance which subjects you wanted to capture?**

PD: Initially, I wanted to focus on the coal mines as they characterise both the city and Donetsk oblast. These mines are almost the sole employer in the region. The infrastructure and rhythm of the city are subject to four-shift mining. In addition, the mines are still considered a relic of the Soviet era, which has taken on a new significance in the context of the ongoing war.

I have approached this topic before in the Public Tinnitus series from 2020, in which I tackled the theme of the effect of coal extraction on the natural environment, the inadequate working conditions, and the stereotyping of male and female gender roles, which have changed drastically due to the outflow of men to the frontline. Women are also now taught to work in the mines, which would have been unthinkable in the past. Even the prospect of the distant end of the war is tainted with the fear that the mines will be closed when coal is phased out in industry.

Despite my elaborate preparations and authorised accreditation, the mine management forbade me to take photographs, saying that the Russians might use my photos. Thanks to personal connections, I was able to reach a group of volunteers and I immediately noticed their working conditions: they were doing volunteer work, but it was very intensive and made even more difficult by the war as many existing problems have been exacerbated by the invasion.

ŠS: **Were the volunteers independent groups of people who helped when they were needed, or were they part of a central volunteer organisation? Was working with them also hampered by security concerns?**

PD: These were both individuals and various organisations.

The volunteers from Donetsk want to build a network that is independent of the municipality; however, the Donetsk administration not only doesn't help but actually interferes with the volunteers' efforts – no wonder it's not trusted. Distrust of the state administration or the municipal authorities is a typical feature of post-soviet states, which is why the volunteers don't try to exert pressure on the city administration but instead rely on self-organisation.

Dobropillia has less than 40 thousand inhabitants, so the volunteers know and help each other. When one organisation needs a car or building materials, they call other volunteers. So far, they have always been able to get what they need, even the community buildings where they meet. The longer the war goes on, the more determined these people are to change their reality for the better.

Even before I came to Dobropillia, I kept in touch with one of the volunteers. We were finalising the purchase of socks, dry showers, toothpaste and other basic necessities for those at the frontline. Thanks to her, it was easy to meet others. It took her an hour to tell other volunteers about my work and send me ten phone numbers. After a couple of hours, I had arranged meetings with all of them, and before a week had passed I had already photographed them.

The only difficulties came from the city's military administration. As there is critical and military infrastructure in Dobropillia, everyone who takes photographs in the city is scrutinised, and every accreditation is verified by the Security Service of Ukraine. They forbade me to take pictures in the hospital as it is often the target of missile strikes, therefore the risk associated with publishing pictures of medical facilities is too high.

ŠS: **You photograph not only people who have organised themselves because of the war, but also those who have been active in the community for a long time.**

PD: The war created the need for volunteer help behind the frontline, but it also worsened many of the problems the city was struggling with before the invasion. My first meeting was with women who gather under the stadium grandstands every day to weave camouflage nets. Some of the women have jobs, others are on maternity leave, some are students, others are retired. Initially, they worked individually at night in their own homes, but they soon organised themselves via social media, were given a room by the city, and now work there in shifts. One of the main coordinators, Jana, told me the story of a pensioner who had to give up making nets because of her poor health but was assigned smaller tasks that helped her cope with the reality of war. You could say that this is also a form of therapy for the local women. They supply various military units with camouflage nets, but they also make them for their loved ones and friends at the frontline.

ŠS: **The story of the two local women who take care of homeless animals is an example of addressing a long-term problem that has been exacerbated by the war.**

PD: Olexandra looks after cats, Viktoriia looks after dogs. They both work on a voluntary basis and have fought for years for support from the city, e.g., a place for an animal shelter and quarantine, but without success. So, they still have to keep the animals at home, especially the neutered ones, as they require the most attention.

Viktoriia looks after of 40 dogs in her house, while Olexandra lives with her 12-year-old daughter and 15 cats in a one-room flat. Both women distribute food to different parts of the city. They have built up a network of volunteers who feed and register street animals, which helps Viktoriia and Olexandra assess how many female cats and dogs need to be neutered and how much money they need to collect for the local veterinary clinic. They seek funding through various overseas

▩ Women of different ages gather in Dobropillia every day to weave camouflage nets. Students, mothers on maternity leave, working women and pensioners weave nets for their friends, partners and unknown soldiers serving in various units

↓ The number of homeless animals has drastically increased since the escalation of war. People fleed in panic, letting their cats and dogs out in the streets. Volunteers sometimes had to break into homes in order to free the animals trapped inside. There is no shelter in the city, so Oleksandra took in over a dozen cats. She and her daughter live with them in a small one-room apartment

▩ Schools and kindergartens in Dobropillia remain closed

foundations, but also from local donations. They are highly dependent on the generosity of individuals.

The Ukrainian legislation is inadequate because it does not criminalise the neglect of pets. After the invasion, people fled their homes in panic and simply left their cats and dogs on the street. You cannot blame them, because they did not know what was going to happen. Many towns were depopulated and only hungry animals roamed the streets.

ŠS: **Many men are at the frontline. Does that mean that most local volunteer organisations are run by women?**

PD: As I said, the war has changed many persistent gender stereotypes; for example, women have begun to work in the mines. Until recently this was a taboo subject, but women are being trained to work underground due to the shortage of male miners. There has also been a visible shift in volunteer initiatives, many of which are actually coordinated by women, although not exclusively: men still work with drug addicts, but a rehabilitation centre for addicted women has not yet been established.

ŠS: **Drug addiction seems to be an extremely sensitive issue in times of war. I am impressed by your original approach to the men who run the addiction centre on a voluntary basis, by the atmosphere in your photos. How did you manage to get in touch with this group?**

PD: We met outside the city. They have set up a day care unit and a sobering-up station in a former bank headquarters. The people who are brought there rarely survive the night, but those who manage to recover from their addiction – around 15% – can stay, help run the facility and raise funds. There is little support from the state, which mainly donates methadone and HIV tests; otherwise, the centre depends on volunteers and its patients.

The leader of the initiative is Olexandr, a former addict. I met with everyone who works at the centre and wanted to participate in the project. They were very open: they made me tea and bought a lot of sweets. We sat around a table and talked, at first about general matters concerning the organisation, but soon we started talking about the patients' personal stories. They were all similar in some way, starting with experiments and taking drugs out of boredom.

Although the possession of drugs is strictly punishable by law, experimenting with illicit substances is widespread even among children. My interviewees addressed this sensitive topic openly. Many of them have been at the centre for a long time and I think they had already worked through their problems. They draw their strength from their faith, because this community uses religious motivation to counter addiction.

Volunteers from Dobropillia devote all of their time to help other residents who are fighting for survival

Rehabilitation centre for men recovering from drug addiction, located in a former bank headquarters

Drug use has skyrocketed during the war. The reality is so gruesome that the locals treat drugs as a means of escape.

ŠS: **Voluntary initiatives that help others are usually associated with church organisations. It seems as if the church in Dobropillia serves as a substitute for the most basic social infrastructure.**

PD: I photographed Vadym, a Protestant pastor. The area is predominantly Orthodox; the Protestants do not have their own church here, so they congregate in a small community room. Vadym has brought various musical instruments there: drums, electric guitar, keyboard… You would not have found them anywhere else in the city. Schools and the only library are closed because of the war, and children and teenagers cannot participate in any extracurricular activities. That is what motivated Vadym the most. Children can come to the service, but they can also learn and practise playing the instruments.

Vadym also regularly delivers humanitarian aid to the frontline, and he has organised and manages a water filtration station. Poor water quality has been a problem in Dobropillia since the 1970s because a lot of water is used in the mines due to intensive extraction, and the water pipes have not been replaced for a very long time.

The locals had to get used to having access to water for two hours in the morning and evening. It is 'technical' water, which can be used for bathing and washing but cannot be consumed. The residents have to buy drinking water and this is a huge financial burden. Everyone has large plastic bottles at home. Vadym organised a public filtration station in front of the community centre, everyone can get their drinking water there.

ŠS: **One of your photos shows a block of flats with the phrase "Look around!" spray-painted on the wall. You said that this phrase is the leitmotif of your trips to Dobropillia and gains new relevance each time. The situation in the city has been dire for decades. Many public services are provided not by the municipality but by volunteers. The war has exacerbated and deepened many problems.**

PD: I feel that this inscription is relevant to every difficult moment, not only in Dobropillia. The social, political and economic situation affects the quality of life and satisfaction of the local residents. Apart from the decades-long problems with access to water and the intensive and dangerous labour, there is also the impression of marginalisation after the fall of the Soviet Union that is persistent in part of the community. The euphoria of independence was dampened by the immense economic crisis of the 1990s, which forced many people to migrate abroad and take jobs far below their qualifications.

I think it is important to emphasise how brave the volunteers are. They cannot count on the support of the administration, on any level; their work also exposes them to threats, for example from their former colleagues who have fled to the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, which is occupied by Russia and collaborates with its regime.

We talked about working with addicts, a group that is heavily stigmatised by society, but the volunteers struggle to find support even for their work with homeless cats and dogs. Selfless help is also questioned on the basis of religious affiliation: the Protestants undermine the work of the Orthodox, and *vice versa*.

ŠS: **Your series sits on the border between artistic photography and photojournalism. How do you categorise it in the wider context of your professional work? How do you situate your work in the ongoing war?**

PD: In the future, I would like to work with the anarchist systems in Ukraine. They have a long tradition that goes back to the social and political organisations of the Ukrainian Cossacks, the so-called Cossack Democratic Sich, which was founded by serfs who decided to fight for their freedom.

The open Cossack community developed in Dobropillia, among other places. Neither ethnicity nor nationality played a role, and the men organised themselves in an autonomous social structure, independent of any form of power. The current research sheds new light on the role of women in the Cossack communities and strongholds, where they were represented as "snipers". I see some parallels between the past and the work of volunteers today.

At the moment, however, I want to use my photographs to raise money for various organisations. I would at least like to ease the difficult situation of the volunteers in Dobropillia.

TRANSLATED FROM POLISH BY
NATALIA RACZKOWSKA
TRANSLATED FROM CZECH TO POLISH BY
KATARZYNA DUDZIC-GRABIŃSKA

SAND BAGS, OSB BOARDS

and international travel

Monument protection in Ukraine

Sandbags protecting the windows of a public administration building in Lviv, January 2023

TEXT & PHOTO
Artur Wabik

At the end of 2023, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine published a report on Ukrainian monuments destroyed and damaged over the past 26 months as a result of the Russian aggression.[1]

The report shows that up to 1,062 items of cultural heritage have been affected by the hostilities, including 123 monuments of national significance and 846 of local significance. Most damage was recorded in Kharkiv oblast, which is located close to the Russian border and was the first region attacked by the aggressor's army, with 299 destroyed monuments. This is followed by Kherson oblast – 144 monuments, Donetsk oblast – 125, Odesa oblast – 115, Chernihiv oblast – 71, as well as Kyiv oblast and the city of Kyiv itself – 69 monuments. Less damage – only 36 monuments – was recorded in Lviv oblast and Lviv. In total, 18 of the 24 Ukrainian oblasts have been affected to varying degrees.

These damaged monuments make up only a fraction of all the destroyed residential buildings and infrastructure, but they attract the interest of the international community. Since the first days of the war, Polish institutions, non-governmental organisations, and individuals have made wide-ranging efforts to support the rescue of Ukraine's cultural heritage. Lilya Onyshchenko-Shvets, the heritage protection advisor to the mayor of Lviv, points out that monument conservators in Ukraine were completely unprepared for the full-scale Russian invasion.

Fortunately, our Polish friends, with whom we had collaborated in the Shared Heritage[2].

In the initial phase, cooperation between Polish and Ukrainian conservators was very spontaneous. Still, in the first weeks after the escalation, inflammable textiles, mounting tapes, OSB boards, power generators, over five hundred fire blankets and almost two thousand fire extinguishers were sent from Warsaw. Thanks to these supplies from Poland, the monuments in Lviv were safeguarded and the surplus sandbags were used for the protection of heritage sites in Kharkiv. "Our Polish conservator friends sent us two carriages with the necessary supplies. The support was very moving in the first days of the war", recalls Onyshchenko-Shvets.

Due to the full-scale Russian invasion, most of the planned conservation works in Lviv were put on hold. One of the works interrupted by the war was the conservation of a wooden Orthodox church in Lviv oblast. a limestone sculpture of the Pensive Christ from 1610 was removed from the dome of the Boim Chapel in 2021 in order to undergo restoration in a local workshop, under the supervision of Ukrainian and Polish experts. The process, funded by the

↘ "You could feel war in the air, but we had no plans. After 24 February, any materials we could use to secure the Lviv monuments were already gone from the stores", says Onyshchenko-Shvets.

1 The report covers the period from 24 February 2022 to 25 April 2024.For more, see: https://www.talk.org.ua/en/home.

2 Lilia Onyszczenko-Szweć [in:] *Jak chronić dziedzictwo?*, podcast, interviewed by K. Jagodzińska, https://heritagehubkrakow.org/pl/project/jak-chronic-dziedzictwo/ (accessed: 13.05.2024).

Polish Ministry of Culture, was to be carried out using laser technology, but the equipment could not be brought to Ukraine as no company wanted to provide insurance. So, this 17th-century sculpture went to Poland instead. It was restored in a workshop in Ożarów Mazowiecki and exhibited in Okno na Kulturę gallery in Warsaw. It is currently kept in Lviv.

The removal of monuments from the country was one of the fundamental measures taken by the Lviv Cultural Heritage Conservation Office. Nevertheless, many artworks have also been deposited locally. One of the heritage items that was dismantled for safeguarding was Golgotha – the wooden altar of the Armenian Cathedral, consisting of over 250 pieces. "It had survived two world wars and the Soviet period, so we didn't want it to get damaged this time around", summarises Onyshchenko-Shvets. Stone sculptures in the market square and around the cathedral were wrapped in mineral wool and enclosed in special cages that protect them from shockwaves. "This was consulted with experienced Polish and Croatian conservators, one of whom went to Syria right after the war and saw antique sculptures that had been shattered by shockwaves. There is no saving sculptures if they are directly hit, but if a missile strikes nearby, the cage will absorb the blow. We applied the same protection methods to the Mickiewicz Column, for which we received funding from Poland".

The residents of Lviv have also joined the efforts to protect the city's architectural heritage sites. The conservator's office posted an appeal on Facebook which received an overwhelming response. The next appeal was addressed only to people who had their own tools, thus the office could select professionals from the construction and installation industry. One of the first people in Poland who decided to return to work in Ukraine after the full-scale invasion started was monument conservator Anna Kudzia. In her studio on the outskirts of Lviv, she not only restores sculptures and gravestones but also assembles first-aid kits for the Lviv Volunteer Medical Battalion.

Statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Prospekt Svobody secured with scaffoldings and panel fencing, January 2023

→ Statues around the Lviv cathedral secured with mineral wool and panel fencing, October 2023

Statue of Neptune at the Lviv Market Square secured with scaffoldings and corrugated metal sheets, January 2023

"We started sending out first-aid kits because two members of our conservation team are paramedics and one is serving in the infantry", said Kudzia in the summer of 2022.[3]

Those from Anna Kudzia's team who did not end up in the army tried to continue working in the field, especially in the Lychakiv and Yanivsky cemeteries, but the air raid sirens that forced the conservators to stop their work and climb down from the scaffolding were too much of a nuisance. "It was very difficult at first because we were working under a lot of stress. We did not know what to do, so we just secured the objects with anything we could grab", recalls Kudzia. "We also did not know whether

→ Information for the visitors of the Borys Voznytski National Art Gallery in Lviv, April 2024

3 O. Łozińska, *Polska konserwator zabytków we Lwowie: ukraińska część naszego zespołu walczy na froncie*, PAP, 5.07.2022, https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C1277721%2Cpolska-konserwator-zabytkow-we-lwowie-ukrainska-czesc-naszego-zespolu (accessed: 24.06.2024).

4 Michał Krasucki, personal communication.

5 Dom Odbudowy Ukrainy, 15.06.2022, https://um.warszawa.pl/waw/zabytki/-/dom-odbudowy-ukrainy (accessed: 24.06.2024).

T+F: Artur Wabik

we should use protective measures that could withstand two weeks or two years", adds Onyshchenko-Shvets. "The sculptures from the cathedral, which had just recently left Ania's workshop, were protected with mineral wool, but stone elements need air circulation, so we took it off after some time and put a special breathable fabric around them instead".

The change in the approach to the protection of monuments in Lviv was the result of consultations between conservators in Lviv and their partners in Poland. Michał Krasucki, the Director of the Department of Cultural Heritage Protection in Warsaw, was one of the first to join the efforts to protect Ukraine's monuments. It was on his initiative that the House for the Reconstruction of Ukraine was founded in Warsaw. "The time is ripe for support on a different level", wrote Rafał Trzaskowski, president of Warsaw, in a press release in June 2022. The House for the Reconstruction of Ukraine is a Polish–Ukrainian think tank that organises meetings between representatives of municipal authorities from both countries in order to discuss Ukraine's current needs. "We talk to local Ukrainian officials; we ask about their needs and opportunities for cooperation"[4] – says Krasucki.

Conservators from Kharkiv, Khortytsia, Chernivtsi, Chernihiv, Dnipro, Kyiv, Lviv, Lutsk, Sumy and Zaporizhia participate in recurring online consultation sessions. On the Polish side, in addition to the Warsaw cultural heritage conservator, the municipal and city conservators of Będzin, Kraków, Lublin, Łódź, Olsztyn, Poznań, Raciborz, Ruda Śląska, Rzeszów, Sopot, Szczecin, Toruń and Żory also take part in the meetings of the House for the Reconstruction of Ukraine. Regular participants also include representatives of the team from the Polish Support Centre for Culture in Ukraine, which was established by the Polish National Heritage Institute. The leading topics of the meetings are the safeguarding, surveying, and post-war reconstruction of Ukrainian monuments. There were 40 such meetings in 2023.

"It is good to have this immediate connection and people who can advise us, especially because our needs are changing", says Onyshchenko-Shvets. "Since the energy infrastructure has become the target of missile attacks, power outages have grown especially problematic, as they can have a detrimental effect on our museum collections". The House for the Reconstruction of Ukraine has provided 56 organisations in 19 Ukrainian cities with 62 power generators and 22 portable charging stations. The total cost of the equipment amounts to almost half a million zlotys[5]. Lviv has become the logistical centre from which the necessary materials and equipment are transported to Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, and other cities in the east and south of Ukraine.

One of the most important initiatives of the House for the Reconstruction of Ukraine was the preparation of applications to include historic Ukrainian urban complexes on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Among the earmarked areas were the historical centres of Odesa and Chernihiv, as well as Freedom Square in Kharkiv (including Derzhprom, the first skyscraper in the USSR, built in 1928 in the constructivist style). The centre of Odesa was added to the list in 2023, but this did not reduce the intensity of Russian air raids. On 29 April 2024, a Russian missile hit the Palace of Students of Odesa Law Academy, killing 5 people and injuring 32. This historic building was completely destroyed. Nevertheless, Lilya Onyshchenko-Shvets believes that it makes sense to include Ukrainian monuments on the list of endangered UNESCO World Heritage Sites. In addition to Odesa, the historic centres of Kyiv and Lviv have also been added. "If they are damaged, it will be possible to seek compensation from Russia through a separate legal route. The paradox is that the war has brought us the interest of international institutions, which have become our strongest supporters", says Onyshchenko-Shvets.

Taras Voznyak, General Director of the Borys Voznytski National Art Gallery in Lviv and the Simferopol Museum of Art, agrees:

> “In the occupied territories, we are already collecting evidence for future lawsuits”, says Voznyak, who represented Ukraine in the dispute over Scythian artefacts from museums in occupied Crimea that were held in the Netherlands.

On 26 October 2021, the Amsterdam Court of Appeal ruled that the artefacts, worth over 10 million euros, must be returned to Ukraine. Russia has appealed and the proceedings are ongoing. “We are working on an inventory of lost Ukrainian artworks that the state is seeking to recover. The list will be published on the website of the Ministry of Culture. We encourage museums around the world to cut their ties with institutions that are known to hold items stolen from Ukraine”, says Voznyak.

In June 2023, Andrii Sadovy, the Mayor of Lviv, proposed to UNESCO that a new facility covering heritage protection in Eastern Europe be established in Lviv. a building that housed the Lviv broadcasting station of Polish Radio in the 1930s is currently being renovated and will soon become the headquarters of a new organisation called Lviv Culture Hub[6]. Aleksandra Sosnowska, the UNESCO advisor for the establishment of this institution, says that it will focus primarily on training and improving the qualifications of those who study cultural heritage in Ukraine and are responsible for monument protection during the war. This is particularly important because Lviv has become a rescue centre for museums from the eastern regions of the country. “Entire collections, as well as directors of museums that have ceased to exist – they all come to Lviv”, confirms Voznyak.

While museums in Mariupol, Melitopol, and Kherson were looted with the involvement of the Russian state, the museums in central Ukraine either hid their collections or evacuated them to the western regions of the country. Lilya Onyshchenko-Shvets is in contact with the director of the Okhtyrka Regional Museum in Sumy oblast. Russians destroyed this town with thermobaric bombs in the first days of the invasion. “It’s a small town, 40 kilometres from the border, and a small museum that documents life in the region. They managed to save the entire collection”, says Onyshchenko-Shvets happily.

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The collection of the Kherson Museum of Art was not so lucky. It was packed and awaiting transport due to the planned remodelling of the building. Unfortunately, shortly before the planned relocation, the Russian army entered the city and transported everything to Crimea. “Our Lviv gallery is not under this much threat, but we moved the permanent collections to storage rooms and basements, and out of the city”, says Taras Voznyak. “The most valuable pieces have been deposited in long-term exhibitions abroad, in Poland, Lithuania and Italy. They can be seen in Wawel Royal Castle, the Royal Castle in Warsaw, the National Museum in Poznań or the Lithuanian National Museum of Art in Vilnius”. One of the effects of such a deposit was the spectacular exhibition of Lviv rococo sculptures (including those by Johann Georg Pinsel), which was presented last summer in Wawel Royal Castle.

The Borys Voznytski National Gallery of Art in Lviv comprises 20 institutions – palaces and castles with separate expositions. It took almost six months to move all the artworks from the permanent exhibitions to the storage rooms. “After that, we returned to normal operations. Instead of Old Masters, we present the works of contemporary artists”, says Voznyak. Almost all museums in Lviv are open again, although some only partially. Interestingly, due to the internal displacement caused by the war, the number of

6 https://www.lvivculturehub.com.

7 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasylkiv_maiolica_rooster (accessed: 24.06.2024).

8 Quote from an unpublished interview with Vasyl Rozhko.

visitors has reached a level that was unheard of before the invasion. New residents of Lviv are eager to visit the local museums, especially on weekends, which has a positive impact on the institutions' finances. "The war has changed a lot in the way Ukrainians see the culture and heritage of our country. Moreover, with many of our artists exhibiting their work in Europe, Ukrainian art is gaining recognition and acclaim abroad", affirms Onyshchenko-Shvets.

> In the third year of the full-scale war in Ukraine and in view of the recurring threat of losing more territories in the east of the country, the issue of documenting the current state of heritage sites is gaining urgency.

The digitisation of archives and 3D scans of historical architecture had already begun before the escalation, but the Russian offensive has interrupted it in many places. "The university in Chernivtsi is on the UNESCO list", says Onyshchenko-Shvets. "We are currently in the process of digitising its archive. Originally, there were no companies in Ukraine that wanted to take on this task, but now they are doing it. We are also scanning our archive in Lviv. We have received tremendous help from the ALIPH fund [supporting cultural heritage in regions threatened by conflict – ed.], which has gifted us a large scanner".

Vasyl Rozhko, founder of HeMO, the Ukrainian Heritage Monitoring Lab organisation, monitors war damage on site. In Borodianka near Kyiv, where the famous Vasylkiv maiolica rooster survived a Russian missile attack[7], Rozhko used a drone to document an entire destroyed block and created a 3D model that will accompany the recovered figure in a museum exhibition. However, using laser scanners to create 3D models is not this organisation's main task. "We want to set up a new system to monitor the condition of cultural heritage items and sites in Ukraine: both museum deposits and historic buildings across the country", says Rozhko. "So far, we have only been able to document around 800 objects".[8]

In May, the House for the Reconstruction of Ukraine discussed decommunisation. While this process is more or less complete in Poland and western Ukraine, it is still a pressing issue in the east of the country. "Should we remove some of the memorials of the Soviet era? Won't we regret it later?", asks Onyshchenko-Shvets. "Our colleagues from Warsaw shared their experience with decommunisation". It is an important conversation to have because today's anti-Russian sentiments, which are obviously justified, are leading to the removal from Ukraine's public spaces of any remnants of Russian domination in the region. This was the fate of the monuments to Catherine II and Viktor Suvorov in Odesa.

The most important outcome of the collaboration between Polish and Ukrainian monument conservators is the establishment of a network of contacts and clear recommendations for the future reconstruction of Ukrainian cities. A prelude to this process is the open-air exhibition entitled Phoenix cities, organised by the Director of the Department of Cultural Heritage Protection in Warsaw and the Ossoliński National Institute. The exhibition shows examples of post-war reconstruction of European cities, as well as cases of reconstruction which are already taking place in some parts of Ukraine; it was first shown in Lviv, then in Kyiv and currently in Chernihiv. "We firmly believe in the reconstruction of Ukrainian cities after the war", states Michał Krasucki.

For some, the end of the war may be a long way off. The most optimistic scenarios anticipate a freeze in the conflict next year; however, most analysts assume that the war will continue – in one form or another – for several more years. When asked about the situation in Kharkiv, Krasucki says that reconstruction there is currently limited to urgent repairs, predominantly to residential buildings. "Nobody is making any serious attempts to renovate there", he adds. This is fully justified, as the second-largest Ukrainian city is near the Russian border and is attacked almost every day. On 23 May, the city was hit by nine S-300 missiles. The targets included one of the country's largest printing houses. Seven employees were killed, and 50 thousand books burned. Ukraine is gradually learning to adapt to the reality of war. New initiatives documenting the wartime losses and analysing ways of future reconstruction are being established thanks to knowledge and funding from abroad. "On the Polish side, we are seeing a significant decline in support from civic society", says Michał Krasucki. "We are currently prioritising the systemic exchange of experience in order to ensure the best allocation of funds in the future". I just hope that Ukraine has the strength to keep fighting.

TRANSLATED FROM POLISH BY
NATALIA RACZKOWSKA

Shaping

SPACES OF SOCIABILITY

Social infrastructure and the gentle transformation of Budapest's Népszínház Street

TEXT
Levente Polyák

I'm walking down Budapest's Népszínház Street. Leaving behind Blaha Lujza Square, one of the city's major public transportation hubs, I'm entering Józsefváros, a district that was, until not so long ago, stigmatised for its unconcealed poverty and infamous for prostitution and street crime.

Festival on a pavement in Jozsefvaros, a district of Budapest
Photo: Eutropian

I am traversing a peculiar landscape: the street – defined by spectacular art deco buildings, some designed by famous architects who, in their own ways, aimed to redefine the relationship between buildings and the city – diagonally crosses an otherwise rectangular urban fabric, thereby creating singular situations in its encounters with side streets connecting at various angles.

As some recent experiments in creating green oases demonstrate, each non-rectangular corner carries a variety of possibilities: this is where Népszínház Street transforms into small squares, offering strollers the space and time to slow down, lean against the wall of a building or sit on a bench, and contemplate street life. Not that the street itself lacks unhurried places: every few metres, one encounters small groups gathering in front of tobacco shops, Chinese restaurants, South Asian delis, Nigerian cybercafés, second-hand bookstores, furniture sellers and repair shops, basement pubs or recently opened hipster bars and co-working spaces, the adjacent park and the market hall.

For several centuries, Népszínház Street has been the quintessential street where marginalised communities, freshly arrived immigrants and the bourgeois-bohème found their home; as such, its social infrastructures reflect a great diversity of ways to socialise. While the local municipality has been reluctant to interfere with the street's fragile balance, the physical regeneration of the area feels more and more timely and raises a crucial question in today's urban planning: how to improve life quality in a neighbourhood without automatically bringing about displacement and further marginalisation through gentrification, commercialisation and touristification?

While displacement is primarily enacted in the housing domain by means of rising rents, evictions, or the decimation of affordable housing units, it is further accentuated by the disintegration of local social networks due to the disappearance of spaces of sociability that hold together a neighbourhood through casual acquaintances, interpersonal and inter-family relations, and mutual help and care. In order to improve the physical fabric of the city without impairing its social fabric, it is important to understand better what a neighbourhood's elements that act as connectors are – turning strangers into neighbours and weaving an informal welfare net.

DEFINING SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure is often conceived as a means to mediate our connections with nature, energy, and information, in the form of sewage systems, electricity networks and broadband internet cables, for instance. However, we also need mediators between humans and humans; this set of connectors is often called social infrastructure. This term was popularised by the American sociologist Eric Klinenberg, who investigated the deadly 1995 heat wave of Chicago in his influential book "Palaces for the People". Combining data on the number of casualties and socio-economic conditions in various Chicago neighbourhoods, Klinenberg established the hypothesis that areas with stronger social capital are more resilient to various kinds of challenges, including heat waves and pandemics, and that such social connections largely depend on the existence

of suitable social infrastructure, namely spaces that allow for encounters and sociability. While Klinenberg's research methods have met with significant criticism throughout the academic community, his analysis offers an inspiring optic to explore urban space through its potential to generate human connections and local social networks.

Klinenberg defines social infrastructure as "the physical conditions that determine whether social capital develops. When social infrastructure is robust, it fosters contact, mutual support, and collaboration among friends and neighbors; when degraded, it inhibits social activity, leaving families and individuals to fend for themselves".[1] For Klinenberg, it is the everyday use of social infrastructure that makes a difference between well-connected and fragmented communities:

> ↘ "People forge bonds in places that have healthy social infrastructures – not because they set out to build community, but because when people engage in sustained, recurrent interaction, particularly while doing things they enjoy, relationships inevitably grow[2].

These are the spaces of social infrastructure that enhance empathy, exchange and cooperation. Spaces that enable "local, face-to-face interactions – at the school, the playground, and the corner diner – are the building blocks of all public life"[3] where "social cohesion develops through repeated human interaction and joint participation in shared projects".[4]

1 E. Klinenberg, *Palaces for the People*, New York: Penguin Random House, 2018, p. 5.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p. 11.

↗ Mandak-haz in Jozsefvaros
Photo: Eutropian

→ Aurora Garden in Jozsefvaros
Photo: Eutropian

MEASURING SOCIABILITY

As seen in the definitions above, social infrastructure is a matter of architectural constellations (spaces that enable encounters) and institutional forms (public facilities that invite people to spend time and communicate with each other). There are different ways to assess these places' community-building potential: through their spatial arrangements, affordances (the capacity of a space to generate interaction), or public institutions (that offer welfare services that connect people).

Social sciences have long been trying to understand the conditions that enable social interaction and enhance sociability in neighbourhoods. While there is no single "universal" tool to measure sociability in an urban area, there are several metrics that enable researchers to understand a neighbourhood's potential to generate new acquaintances. Furthermore, these metrics help us understand the building blocks that constitute sociability, and the architectural, urbanistic or institutional aspects of social interaction.

Certain methodologies explore the physical layout of neighbourhoods, trying to understand how compactness and the availability of public spaces might determine the possibility of social interactions. The Social Interaction Potential (SIP) concept, for example, developed in the domain of urban planning and design, assesses the possibility of social encounters through indicators like spatial layout, visibility, accessibility and amenities. Other methods are less interested in spatial constellations than existing interactions and social networks. In order to appraise the strength of social connections and relationships, the Social Cohesion Index (SCI) examines factors of trust between neighbours, participation in civic activities, perceptions of safety, and sense of belonging to a place. Community Vitality Indicators (CVIs) are a set of metrics exploring

T: Levente Polyák

levels of volunteerism, participation in local organisations and attendance of community events in order to assess the health and vitality of local communities.

While many of these methods offer quantitative metrics to measure sociability, they are often blind to the architectural and institutional qualities that would enable not only social interactions but also social inclusion and inter-class or inter-ethnic exchange – crucial elements of social cohesion in places like Népszínház Street in Budapest. Therefore, it is important to explore the actual spaces and institutions that serve as anchors of local communities: these can be conceived as cornerstones of improving the quality of life in urban neighbourhoods without displacing less-affluent residents and less-competitive businesses.

THE DIFFERENT SPACES OF SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

If Klinenberg mentions the school, the playground, and the corner diner as cornerstones of social infrastructure, this is by no means a normative list of facilities needed in every community. On the contrary, different social groups use different strata of spaces and services: public spaces and green areas can serve as connectors just as much as public institutions, community venues or commercial establishments. Modes and times of socialising might differ in front of tobacco shops, Chinese restaurants, South Asian delis, Nigerian cybercafés, second-hand bookstores, furniture sellers and repair shops, basement pubs or recently opened hipster bars and co-working spaces, the adjacent park and the market hall. Therefore, for urban planners working on the renewal of an area, it is important to understand the value of each and every space of sociability to comprehend their role in nourishing local communities.

In his book reviewing 25 years of urban regeneration in Brussels, the sociologist

Mathieu Berger describes the great variety of architectural interventions conceived in the Neighbourhood Contracts framework. Aiming to improve life in disadvantaged neighbourhoods by developing connections between social groups and anchoring individuals in the broader society, these interventions can have many different forms: "The sports hall is a place of convergence and shared activities for young people in particular; the day nursery provides visibility to the family and children as well as animation and security for the neighbourhood; the Maison de quartier and the community centre are spaces that nurture a collective identity that is flexible and open to whatever one wishes to introduce there; the business centre is a sign of hope and economic revitalisation".[5]

Different elements of social infrastructure offer different ways to connect with each other. Playgrounds or dog parks can become the site of new friendships through regular but unplanned encounters of parents or dog owners. Local shops can act as part of a neighbourhood-scale welfare net that keeps an eye on the wellbeing of regular customers. Community spaces, in turn, have the capacity to generate cooperation deliberately. When a cultural centre's restaurant is open only for one hour at lunchtime, it will encourage its customers to meet each other over a meal and share their thoughts and plans. When freelancers in a co-working space bump into each other around the coffee machine, they might take a moment and update each other about their projects. It is often in these limiting physical settings that new collaborations are born.

PUBLIC SPACES AS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

John Paul II Square, with its vast lawns, is as much a space for conflicts between dog owners, families and homeless people as a place for spending time together. Similarly, Teleki Square, another important park in the neighbourhood, does in fact consist of two different ideas of public space: one conceived through a participatory design process dominated by white middle-class women and resulting in a beautiful green garden for quiet, almost sterile contemplation, and another one designed for children and youth (of mostly Roma origin) where social activities are understood as animated and potentially loud.

While different designs and spatial constellations might enhance or determine different kinds of behaviour in public space, it is important not to confuse aesthetics with actual use. a decade and a half ago, as an intern at New York City Department of City Planning, I had the task of overseeing the use of privately owned public space, also known as POPS, a peculiar policy instrument that allows developers to build more floor space in exchange for creating designated public spaces that should, in theory, be accessible for all. POPS were seen as a way to involve private funding in the creation of public amenities in areas where public space is scarce and much needed.

In my work evaluating the accessibility of POPS, however, I found a body of research that suggested that this policy was not as efficient as it seemed: while most POPS complied with regulations in terms of the proportion of seating, vegetation, sunny and shaded areas or water features, many of them were not designed to be attractive for use.[6] On the contrary: while these public spaces were designed to be appealing to the eye, they used features such as wind, sun, shade, water and materials as a means to repel users by making (metal) benches too hot or cold to use, or always flooded by the adjacent upwind fountain. These instances were not accidental flaws in design: research demonstrated the existence of specific design guidelines, instrumentalised by banks and insurance companies in particular, that saw good-looking but deserted plazas in front of their offices and headquarters as more fitting to their image than as lively public spaces packed with people of all kind.[7]

The "spectacularisation of urban space"[8] has been a product of neoliberal logics of urban transformation, associated with the securitisation and sterilisation of public spaces. While claiming an appreciation of street life and community values, urban regeneration based on beautified streetscapes often looks at public spaces as mere aesthetic phenomena, partly ignoring their social, economic and ecological dimension.[9]

This spectacularisation of public space is not limited to the domain of neoliberal urban development: representative squares that subordinate use to the conveyance of political messages of history and identity also disenfranchise users by delegating them to the role of mere spectators. In her book "Se réunir", the philosopher Joëlle Zask reminds us of the "contradiction between the space of the spectacle and the space of freedoms" that are necessary components of democratic life, calling for a rethinking of historical European squares dominated by "centrality, symmetry, rectilinear layouts and minerality".[10] Often turned towards a central object, these historical squares are dominated by power, as opposed to places "where democratic sociability and its accompanying set of 'virtues' can be experienced".[11]

5 M. Berger, *The Lifetime of a Policy*, Brussels: CIVA, 2019, p. 90.

6 J. Németh, *Defining a Public: The Management of Privately Owned Public Space*, "Urban Studies" 2009, vol. 46, no 11, pp. 2463–2490.

7 G. Smithsimon, *Dispersing the Crowd: Bonus Plazas and the Creation of Public Space*, "Urban Affairs Review" 2008, vol. 43, no 3, pp. 325–351.

8 A. Bélanger, *Sport venues and the spectacularization of urban spaces in North America: the case of the Molton Center in Montreal*, "International Review for the Sociology of Sport" 2000, vol. 35, no 3, pp. 378–397; M. Silk, J. Amis *Bursting the Tourist Bubble: Sport and the Spectacularization of Urban Space*, [in:] *Sport Tourism: Paradigms and Theories*, ed. H. Gibson, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2006.

9 S. Zukin, *Naked City*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 116.

10 J. Zask, *Se réunir*, Paris: Premier Parallèle, 2022, p. 30.

11 Ibid., p. 64.

T: Levente Polyák

While public spaces, i.e., universally accessible street corners, squares, parks and gardens, perform well in certain sociability and interaction indexes, they do not automatically serve as integrative social infrastructure. The new parklet in Népszínház Street, opened by NGOs exploring the neighbourhood's identity and cultural heritage, still needs the locals to become accustomed to it as they are not used to sitting among cars and don't see the street as anything more than a means of transportation. In turn, the sidewalks in front of internet cafés and tobacco shops where marginalised groups gather need to be accepted and appreciated in the eyes of urban planners as genuine public spaces, despite not belonging to the contemporary aesthetics of placemaking. It is important for planners to put aside their prejudices and explore neighbourhoods on foot to understand how different streets and squares invite different groups to spend time together: such observations – building on a long tradition connecting Holly White[12] with Jan Gehl[13] and many other placemakers – can inform the design and programme of future public spaces and influence the social composition of neighbourhoods.

Local community meeting at Kazan
Photo: Eutropian

LOCAL COMMERCE AS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Legally belonging to a different domain than public spaces, the ground floors of buildings nevertheless have a great impact on the public realm of cities. The street feels different and strollers behave differently in front of bars, libraries, flower stores or bicycle repair shops. The grocery shop and the second-hand bookshop with their colourful shelves outside, the pastry shop for passengers going on long tram rides, the Kashmiri restaurant making use of a scaffolding for advertisement, internet cafés attracting members of the African diaspora or bars offering cheap drinks – all influence Népszínház Street and interact with its public spaces.

Local commerce affects diversity: instead of large, monolithic commercial blocks that might attract a homogenous group of clients, a diverse retail composition might address a greater variety of shoppers. Analysing the success of New York's SoHo district in terms of urban fabric, street dynamism and public spaces, the architecture scholars Anne Mikoleit and Moritz Pürckhauer note that small, specialised shops are essential to maintaining a district's vitality: "they provide a dense concentration of products, capturing the interest of different types of customer, and keeping the sidewalks busy throughout the day".[14] Such vitality also impacts walkability: if foot traffic is not concentrated in specific periods of the day but is somewhat evenly distributed from morning until evening, it makes an area safer, always watched by strollers and their "eyes on the street".

Local commerce, the most banal of social infrastructures used by most inhabitants on a daily basis, can also act as a key welfare net for a neighbourhood. Mostly designed for brief encounters, local shops can nevertheless serve as a place where neighbours can exchange information, offer or look for services, leave their keys or pick up their packages.

12 W.H. White, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, New York: Project for Public Spaces, 1980.

13 J. Gehl, B. Svarre, *Jak studiować życie w przestrzeni publicznej*, Washington DC: Island Press, 2013.

14 A. Mikoleit, M. Pürckhauer, *Urban Code. 100 Lessons for Understanding the City*, Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 2011, p. 40.

↘ For many elderly people, the daily shopping exercise is an important moment of socialisation. Shopkeepers that know their clientele well; they might notice if someone has missed their daily routine shopping and might call them to check if everything is alright.

It is by no means a surprise that cities like Barcelona recently began taxing supermarkets that replaced humans with automated cashiers. Other cities like New York use microzoning to exclude certain kinds of commercial activities (hotels, banks, insurance companies) from lively neighbourhoods, with the aim of increasing foot traffic and reducing the presence of retail units that serve more as advertisements than for daily use.

The city of Paris, which considers retailing to be part of its community infrastructure, supports shops that act as an important welfare net and are part of the social fabric of a neighbourhood. Having identified a variety of shops as representing social and cultural values important for Paris, the city's public SEMAEST company supports shopkeepers with joint infrastructure such as online shops, home delivery services and storage. This allows shops that are important building blocks of the local social fabric to be more competitive against online shopping and e-commerce, which eliminate human encounters. This approach helps individual businesses to share resources and build networks to become more resilient and competitive, both individually and collectively, reducing costs and lowering operational thresholds for them.

Through their regulatory powers and ownership of some ground-floor properties, many municipalities have leverage over retail composition and, therefore, also the impact of local commerce on streetscapes and public spaces. If the district of Józsefváros has recently begun to use its ground-floor property stock as a means to steer urban transformation and has launched programmes to offer incentivised rent to initiatives that are estimated to have a revitalising effect, it is only the beginning of the long-term process of retail planning. While fine-tuning the retail composition of Népszínház Street and the surrounding blocks might take years, it could be a powerful instrument to protect some of the key commercial activities that catalyse sociability, and to attract new ones to the neighbourhood.

PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY VENUES AS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

In Budapest's continental climate, public spaces and sidewalks in front of shops allow for sociability and exchange from late spring until early Autumn. In turn, indoor community venues provide continuity in colder months or accommodate social gatherings with specific infrastructural needs. Community spaces are important nodes in local civic ecosystems[15]: by creating encounters between people and groups that rarely meet outside their walls, they enable the "reconstruction of social relations and forms of coexistence through physical spaces".[16]

Community spaces play an important role in local social infrastructure: by mobilising resources to meet the needs of their surroundings, by confronting new ideas to spark innovation, and by generating new economic flows with the participation of many local partners, they stand at the centre of connections and collaborations. When these spaces that are "capable of anchoring processes of empowerment and political capabilities as well as social activation"[17] take a position in the development of their neighbourhood or city – begin to act on their surroundings and start "rewiring" the society around them – they become "trigger spaces (...) that collect social energy and at the same time become co-design laboratories and spaces for the production of collective services".[18]

Spaces reclaimed for community functions differ from each other not only in their physical attributes but also in their organisational and management principles, accessibility, financial sustainability, and political dimension. What links them is that they all address the lack of existing facilities for community gathering, social activities, welfare services, independent work and cultural exchange, thus taking a position in the discourse about well-being, solidarity and accessibility. Many community-run spaces manage social and cultural activities, such as "language schools for foreigners, local nurseries and playrooms, cinema forums, employment agencies, study rooms, or services such as those related to sports activities, dance schools, theatre schools".[19] By connecting such a diversity of services that the public sector is unable to provide and by opening their doors to a variety of social groups and activities, these community spaces also change the nature of these services.

For the past decade, the neighbourhoods around Népszínház Street have become epicentres of newly established cultural and social venues, not only catering for local residents but also attracting visitors from across the city. Many of these new venues address specific communities organised around contemporary art (ISBN), visual arts and cinema (Dobozi 21), soft mobility and short-chain food distribution (Cargonomia), circular economies (Repair Café), or creativity and visual culture (Kästner Community). While these new venues act as nuclei of progressive thought in the city and

contribute to the symbolic desegregation of certain Józsefváros neighbourhoods by opening them up to the wider city, they also plausibly accelerate the district's gentrification, symbolised by new coffee houses and pastry shops, hotels and co-working spaces, as well as innumerable Airbnb apartments.

However, many of these venues, especially the underground cultural centres Auróra and Gólya or the intercultural centres Mandák ház and Míra ház, have also put an emphasis on attracting local Roma and other ethnic minority groups and refugees through their facilities, targeted services or musical programming. Adding to these the inclusive programming of municipal cultural centres such as H13, Keszty̋ugyár and Dankó udvar, the desegregation programme of local kindergartens and schools, the social rental agency offering affordable housing to key workers, as well as public spaces sensibly designed for different social groups, we can see a widespread ambition to counter the tendencies of gentrification, touristification and commercialisation that threaten to homogenise these neighbourhoods.

PLANNING SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Social inclusion and integration do not only play out in educational and welfare institutions: different social groups also build connections in public spaces, community venues or local shops. As Michela Murgia, an important human rights thinker suggests about civic spaces, "it is not important that they are squares or bars, libraries or museums. The category of intended use does not apply to what can be done in these spaces, but to who goes there and transforms the act of going there into a civic experience".[20]

Recognising the importance of social infrastructure may prove to be a key competence for urban planners when conceiving the future of our cities and neighbourhoods.

↘ Future urban regeneration processes need to build on integrative experiments, understanding the integrative value of unusual suspects as well: unusual locations and activities whose intergenerational, interethnic or intercultural potential is not obvious at first sight.

It is therefore more important than ever that planning urban transformation is based on thorough observation of street life as well as the meticulous study of demographic change and the transformation of economic and social activities in the neighbourhoods in question. For example, analysis of mobility patterns through the biographies of residents and local workers or surveys of residents' needs can inform policies in order to support certain commercial activities, prioritise specific actions in public grants, subsidise specific non-profit organisations, or experiment with new types of public spaces. Only such an integrated notion of social infrastructure that connects concepts of public space and housing with those of social services and local economies can inspire public policies across fields of expertise and municipal departments.

15 L. Polyák, S. Bod, L. Bródy, *The Power of Civic Ecosystems*, Vienna: Cooperative City Books, 2021.

16 C. Cellamare, *Abitare le periferie*, Roma: Bordeaux Edizioni, 2020, p. 29.

17 E. Ostanel, *Spazi fuori dal Comune*, Milano: Franco Angeli Edizioni, 2017, p. 11.

18 Ibid. p. 42.

19 C. Cellamare, *Abitare le…*, op. cit., p. 69.

20 M. Murgia, *Futuro interiore*, Torino: Einaudi, 2016, p. 59.

DEMOLISH the PROBLEMS

How residents are defending an urban utopia

TEXT

Hanna Skąpska

Photos by Lou Soler, Elizabeth Carrasco Gonzalez and Céline Delage taken as part of photography classes at ENSA Paris-Belleville, led by Anne Chatelut and Jean Allard, 2021–2022. All rights reserved to École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Paris-Belleville

Cite Pierre Semard, view of a private terrace
Photo: Ewelina Jaskulska

← Cite Pierre Semard under construction in the 1980s, designed by Atelier Iwona Buczkowska
Photo: Atelier Iwona Buczkowska

Why do we consider human-centred architecture to be utopian?[1] Will these utopias that promote the notion of community inevitably fall victim to changing fashions and conflicting interests? The projects of Iwona Buczkowska can be seen as an attempt to resist this trend.

In 2018, this Polish-French architect was invited to a panel discussion with Roland Castro, entitled "L'architecture et l'utopie". The participants examined the architecture and implementations of urban utopias in order to find ways of creating cities and settlements that allow for alternative lifestyles in this age of metropolisation and uniformity. Buczkowska's designs were introduced by the organisers as methods for turning "unavailable possibilities" into reality. It was at this moment that Iwona realised that she is considered an artist who "realises utopias", although she herself sees her projects as natural outcomes of her search for the fundamental characteristics that define the quality of architecture: light, a sense of space, building relationships. In her contribution to Pavillon de l'Arsenal, she explains:

> with my designs for social housing[2], public buildings, and urban development concepts, I wanted to cultivate two dimensions: the ecological and the social qualities of architecture. I strive to promote a feeling of community, [...] I advocate for living with sensitivity and in touch with the natural or urban environment. For me, living in a community means above all communicating, learning, and interacting with each other.[3]

Iwona Buczkowska's vision for architecture is based on the creation of empathetic spaces. "The experiences of the many months of the COVID-19 pandemic show us how much we need nature, community, togetherness, and interactions with other people".[4]

1 Iwona Buczkowska was once asked this question by French sociologist Monique Eleb.

2 For the sake of this article, I use the term "social housing", even though it does not accurately portray the systemic and legislative differences between Poland and France.

3 I. Buczkowska, *Écologie, socialité de l'architecture et plaisir d'habiter*, SIGNE. Pavillon de l'Arsenal, 29.05.2021, https://www.pavillon-arsenal.com/fr/signe/11987-ecologie-socialite-de-larchitecture-et-plaisir-dhabiter.html (accessed: 21.06.2024).

4 Ibid.

AN AGE OF EXPERIMENTS

Perhaps it is empathy that made the architectural community and the wider public interested in Iwona Buczkowska's designs. This Polish architect moved her personal and professional life to Paris in the 1970s to continue her studies, which she had started at Gdańsk Polytechnic. In 1978, she opened her own studio in Ivry-sur-Seine, near Paris. I became interested in her work in 2016, when publications about her were still relatively rare. There was almost nothing in Polish. Today, Iwona Buczkowska is invited to international conferences; her projects are part of the permanent exhibition at the Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine in Paris; she was featured in The Architectural Review, and she received the prestigious Jane Drew Award in February 2024.

Iwona's body of work follows the explorations of late modernism that were started in the 1950s by Team 10 and were continued in France by Jean Renaudie and Renée Gailhoustet, among others. Buczkowska rejects standardisation and considers home a place where ecology and the need for community intersect. She frequently uses arches and diagonal surfaces in her designs. Her architecture shows influences from the organic designs of Frank Lloyd Wright, the cross-sections of Claude Parent, the geometries of Jean Renaudie, and the structures of Yona Friedman and David Georges Emmerich. One of the first construction sites she visited during her studies in France was Les Étoiles by Jean Renaudie, in Ivry near Paris. At the time, Iwona did not know whether she found the structure "beautiful" or "ugly", but, to her, the uncanny geometry of the building and its cascading terraces "represented a form of freedom: freedom of expression for the architects and freedom of lifestyle for the tenants".[5]

When Iwona began her professional career, the zeitgeist in France was favourable to experimentation in architecture and the search for alternative forms of spatial expression. The humanist ideals of the French Cultural Revolution of May 1968 also dominated the architectural and urban discourse. Housing construction had been a national priority for decades, and the authors of the extensive state housing programmes were devoting their attention to social housing. The Grands ensembles – standardised prefabricated social housing estates – that were built en masse in the 1950s and 60s were heavily criticised for their anonymity and ghettoisation. These concerns prompted the government to change the policy, fund research in the construction sector, and promote quality housing solutions[6]. In 1971, the Plan Construction was launched to "enable the creation of [housing – H.S.] environments that would better meet the current and future needs of society".[7] The programme was supervised by the General Delegation for Scientific and Technical Research of the Ministry of Industrial and Scientific Development, as well as the Housing Directory of the Ministry of Public and Residential Buildings. The Programme d'Architecture Nouvelle (PAN) competitions have been held since 1972 to promote innovative structural and architectural designs.

TO SEE AND BE SEEN

The 1970s also marked the beginning of Cité Pierre Semard, also known as La Pièce Pointue due to the triangular plot and pointed shape of the buildings. This housing estate dates back to 1978, when the city of Le Blanc-Mesnil, near Paris, commissioned Sodédat 93, the public development company of the Seine-Saint-Denis department, to develop a six-hectare plot of land near the station of a suburban train line that connected Le Blanc-Mesnil to the centre of Paris. Sodédat 93 was founded in 1974 and four years later was already regarded as a kind of urban planning laboratory, unafraid to take on innovative designs and collaborate with relatively unknown architects. At the time, Iwona Buczkowska was a 24-year-old architect from Poland and had just graduated from École Spéciale d'Architecture in Paris. Sodédat 93 commissioned her to design 224 social housing units, which were built in several phases and completed in 1992. To date, it is the largest housing estate in France built entirely from wood. In addition to the flats, it also houses six artists' studios and a thousand square metres of retail space. The final phase, which included the construction of a primary school, 50 privately owned flats and additional commercial space, was never built.

→ Plan of the settlement cité Pierre Semard, in grey parts that were not realised
Drawing: Atelier Iwona Buczkowska

5 M. Mollard, *Iwona Buczkowska (1953–)*, The Architectural Review, 6.03.2024, https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/reputations/iwona-buczkowska-1953 (accessed: 21.06.2024).

6 G. Lambert, *Les premières réalisations expérimentales du Plan Construction, entre laboratoire et démonstration*, "Lieux Communs – Les Cahiers du LAUA" 2010, no 13, p. 55.

7 Quote from Jacques Chaban-Delmas's letter to Paul Delouvrier from 19.05.1971, published in: *Un nouvel habitat. Plan Construction*, Paris: Plan Construction, April 1977.

T: Hanna Skąpska

Conceived as an extension of the existing low-density urban fabric, the housing estate is a search for a compromise between the living conditions of a detached house and a flat. In his article for "Télérama", François Granon examined the phenomenon of this project: "are these flats or houses? Both, my architect".[8] The low height of the buildings, the vast green spaces, the private gardens on the ground floor and the terraces above create an idyllic image of a housing estate that could not be built today. The inventive use of wooden structure allowed for more freedom in arranging the interiors and gave the estate an intimate feel. Cars have no direct access to the estate's core: the underground car parks are reached via the adjacent streets. The soil excavated during construction was used to build a noise-reducing landscape embankment along the suburban railway – a two-hectare green area with lush vegetation that the residents use for recreation and leisure.

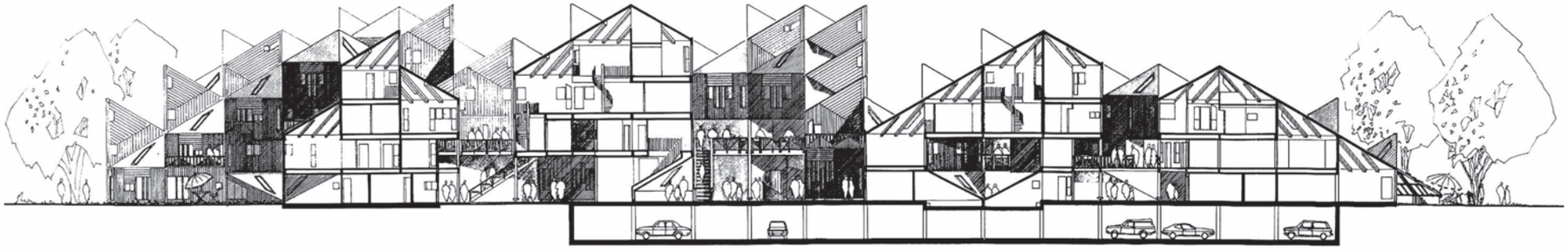
8 F. Granon, *Quelle est belle mon HLM*, „Télérama", décembre 1990, n° 2136.

9 Quote from an interview conducted with Iwona Buczkowska for this article, April 2024.

↘ The inner part of the housing estate is comprised of a mosaic of paths, squares, and green spaces, which expand into walkways on the first floor that lead into the apartments.

The many passageways create perspectives and visual openings in the ground- and first floors. Different zones visually overlap both inside and outside. "I am enamoured by the possibility of exchanging glances, by the fact that, as Walter Benjamin said, people want to see, but also be seen".[9]

Cross section of cite Pierre Semard
Drawing: Atelier Iwona Buczkowska



Véronique has lived in La Pièce Pointue since 1989. She appreciates the family atmosphere on the estate. Since the completion of estate, some tenants have moved away, others have moved in, but most of the original residents come back whenever the opportunity arises. Véronique claims that the unusual geometry of the buildings encourages residents to socialise. "The terraces are oriented towards nature and stick together. Everyone has their privacy, looks after themselves, but if I don't see my neighbours for a while, I check up on them". The neighbours meet near the retaining walls that surround the gardens. "We like to talk about our homes, how we decorate and rearrange them".[10] The residents share a vegetable garden and tend it together; they have also built a composter. When the La Pièce Pointue photo exhibition by the students of ENSA Paris-Belleville opened, they shared cars to get there.

The challenge that Buczkowska set herself when designing Le Blanc-Mesnil was put to the test during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The strict lockdown caused panic in France. Those who were able to do so left their cramped Parisian flats. The lack of access to culture and services painfully exposed the reality of living in the French capital. No less than 39% of Parisian flats are smaller than 40 square metres.[11] Since the pandemic, flats with balconies and other forms of outdoor space have been in high demand and can increase the price of a flat by up to 8.8%. However, these amenities remain a luxury. Only 6% of French apartments have an adjoining outdoor space.[12]

View of cite Pierre Semard
Photo: Lou Soler

10 Quotes from an interview conducted with Véronique for this article, April 2024.

11 *En Île-de-France, depuis 50 ans, le nombre de logements a plus fortement augmenté en grande couronne*, Insee, 2018, https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/5417992#consulter (accessed: 23.04.2024).

12 M. Lomazzi, *Immobilier: très prisés, les balcons et terrasses valent de l'or après le confinement*, Le Parisien, 24.05.2020 (accessed: 23.04.2024).

↘ Buczkowska believes that everyone should have the right to such luxuries.[13] Her main goal in designing both private villas and social housing is always the same: to create good living conditions.

In La Pièce Pointue, "each flat has its own green terrace, which gives back to nature a part of the urban space. These are not balconies created with the aim of bringing some rhythm and interest to the facades, but natural extensions of the flats to the outdoors – a true living space in the summer months, which is so valuable in a densely built-up city during the pandemic…"[14].

13 Quote from an interview conducted with Iwona Buczkowska for this article, April 2024.

14 I. Buczkowska, *Écologie, socialité…*, op. cit.

15 Quote from an interview conducted with Iwona Buczkowska for this article, April 2024.

Sylvie has lived in La Pièce Pointue for over 20 years. She told me how her family members used to swap rooms every few months in her three-level apartment. Since all the rooms have different shapes, neither she nor her children wanted to be confined to a single space and kept moving the furniture back and forth. These accounts are a source of great satisfaction for Iwona Buczkowska because she believes that architects should inspire people to experiment and discover – to wander around. This approach is *form follows function* to a certain degree, but it leaves room for surprises. The luxury of these flats lies in the ability to choose. Why limit yourself to vertical walls and perpendicular ceilings when space expands in numerous directions? This approach is the source of the extraordinary architectural features of La Pièce Pointue: multi-level apartments, non-orthogonal floor plans, skylights in sloping ceilings. "Your gaze is directed upwards, towards the sky, towards infinity. I think this is very poetic. If you orientate your facade in multiple directions, it pens up numerous perspectives".[15]

Buczkowska's projects are all about the pleasure of living in well-designed interiors. We talk about this pleasure when I ask her about the definition of the French expression "plaisir d'habiter", which she used in her article for the Pavillon de l'Arsenal in Paris. We both struggle to translate the phrase into Polish. The literal translation of "plaisir" is "pleasure". Iwona notes a sensual quality to the word: the smell of earth when she sips coffee on her green terrace; zenithal light streaming though the skylight in the sloping ceiling; discovering new landscapes in her own

T: Hanna Skąpska

home; the view from one of the thirty windows in a flat she designed. “Habiter” means “to dwell”, but it is more about the domestication of space, about rediscovering it, about experimentation. One longs to wander around these flats.

SAVING LA PIÈCE POINTUE

The formal complexity and the diverse spatial arrangements contribute to the clear identity of La Pièce Pointue. Budget is the primary constraint in the design of social housing. For this estate, Buczkowska opted for cheaper materials and a wooden structure to allow for larger apartments, bright interiors, and high-quality communal spaces. However, this choice also means that maintaining the buildings is a challenging task. At the beginning of the 21st century, the estate was passed into the hands of a new owner, Seine-Saint-Denis Habitat. This company owns more than 30 thousand social housing units in the Seine-Saint-Denis department. Following the change, the frequency of minor maintenance and upkeep work decreased. The neglect and accumulation of conservation problems led to a serious degradation of the technical condition of the buildings. The bitumen roof cladding, estimated to last 20 years, is in urgent need of replacing. Leaking roofs are an issue in many of the apartments. Water penetrates the wooden structure. Insufficient thermal insulation coupled with the rising cost of energy are causing the resident’s bills to skyrocket. These types of costs are particularly burdensome for social housing tenants.

> The residents have been campaigning for the renovation of the estate for many years. In 2015, Le Blanc-Mesnil published a new local zoning plan. To the dismay of both the tenants and the architect, the document indicates that the city wants to build another project on the site of La Pièce Pointue.

The plans are in line with the long-term vision for the development of the municipality, which is part of the Grand Paris territorial development plan for the Île-de-France region. According to this plan, Le Blanc-Mesnil and Paris are to be connected by the Grand Paris Express – a high-speed suburban train. La Pièce Pointue, an intimate housing estate with undeveloped swaths of greenery, is located on a plot of land right next to the suburban railway station, which is perfect for new developer-led construction. The need for costly renovation is just another excuse from the city authorities. However, the unofficial reason becomes obvious when we look at recent housing projects in Le Blanc-Mesnil, whose neo-Hausmannesque developer-style housing estates suit the tastes of the current mayor. It is therefore no surprise that the city council decided to remove this avant-garde wooden housing estate.

The new local zoning plan led to protests from most tenants and objections from the architect herself. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, the director of Sodédat 93 at the time of the estate’s construction and a passionate advocate for its architecture, published an online appeal to save La Pièce Pointue. His petition collected 1.5 thousand signatures and received the support of Jean Nouvel, Odile Decq, Jean-Philippe Vassal, Rudy Ricciotti, and Ludwika Ogorzelec (who had her own studio in Cité Pierre Semard for years).

In 2018, the city authorities presented their vision for the development of a site opposite La Pièce Pointue. As expected, the gated housing estate, consisting of historicising five-storey apartment blocks, bore no resemblance to the character of Cité Pierre Semard. The project also

↙ Interior of an apartment in cite Pierre Semard
Photo: Elizabeth Carrasco Gonzalez

↘ Veronique, resident of the estate, in her garden
Photo: Celine Delage

involved the destruction of an existing sports field and over 7 thousand square metres of green space, including the felling of old almond trees. Most local residents were strongly opposed to the planned investment. a group of sixteen particularly committed residents decided to take legal action against Cogedim, the private property developer responsible for the project. The company offered to pay the residents 150 thousand euros to settle the case. Fifteen days later, they proposed double the amount, then half a million euros the following day. Even divided among the petitioners, this amount would have exceeded their yearly income, but they still rejected the offer. The court upheld the residents' claim and the development was put on hold.

However, the problems of Cité Pierre Semard did not end there. In 2020, the residents were informed of the plan to sell part of the estate to the Cogedi company, which plans to demolish 130 of the 224 flats and in their place build 527 privately owned apartments in the mayor's favourite style. Once again, the community organised itself against these plans. The head of their association fears that the planned development "will deprive them of the exceptional living conditions to which they have become accustomed".[16]

The case was publicised and became a topic of interest for the architectural community. Students at the ENSA Paris-Belleville architecture school began to visit La Pièce Pointue during class. Students from ENSA Paris--La Villette worked together with the residents to build a wooden pavilion that served as a temporary meeting place (the designated community hall in the estate has been closed for several years and the residents are denied entry). Current and former residents, Iwona Buczkowska, and people involved in the defence of La Pièce Pointue, attended a picnic held to mark the pavilion's completion. The fight to save the estate led the residents to bond with the architect. After alerting the competent authority, the case was taken up by DRAC (the Regional Directorate of Cultural Affairs). The procedure for including Cité Pierre Semard on the list of protected heritage is underway. For lovers of alternative architectural tours, there are numerous podcasts about this "avant-garde wooden housing estate", "architectural curiosity", or "urban UFO". The estate has also been visited by Harvard architecture students.

The authorities of Le Blanc-Mesnil are against granting monument protection status to La Pièce Pointue. The mayor's representatives stigmatise the estate, claiming that it is dangerous, poorly lit and riddled with drug dealers. They describe it as abandoned and threaten that it will soon fall into disrepair. a scandal erupted in October 2022, when Le Blanc-Mesnil published an issue of the city magazine entitled "How could this happen?", which was dedicated to Cité Pierre Semard. An article about this "architectural, urban and ecological disaster" lists issues that had been raised by residents for years and which the owner and the city council had chosen to ignore: dampness, problems with heating, leaking roofs. The journalists explained that the estate only houses people who have no means to move elsewhere. The authors attacked Iwona Buczkowska several times, claiming that the residents "suffer in silence when architecture students visit the estate". Campaigns to put the estate under monument protection or grant it exceptional architecture status were ridiculed. While working on their article, the journalists asked me for a meeting, but I suspect that the opinion I expressed in my response to the author did not fit in with their idea for the piece because I did not receive a reply. The meeting did not take place either.

The residents were shocked. They posted another petition online, representing 220 families. They were disgusted by the one-sided narrative: "In the six-page report [...] there is not a single word about the green spaces, trees and flowerbeds; not a word about children who can play freely in the pedestrian zones...".[17] It is true that the labyrinth of paths and passages so cherished by the residents also has its darker side: its more remote parts are favoured by drug dealers at night, while postmen and deliverymen regularly get lost in the alleyways. There is no doubt that La Pièce Pointue is in need of renovation, but the residents

16 *A la Cité Pierre Sémard, on rêve encore d'éviter la démolition*, Le Grand Parisien 93, 3.07.2021 (cover article). The association has emphasized the high quality of living conditions in Cité Pierre Semard on many occasions.

17 *Pétition de soutien aux locataires de la cité Pierre Semard de Blanc-Mesnil*, Change.org, 16.10.2022, https://www.change.org/p/p%C3%A9tition-de-soutien-aux-locataires-de-la-cit%C3%A9-pierre-semard-de-blanc-mesnil (accessed: 13.05.2024).

Protests against the demolition of cite Pierre Semard
Photo: Hanna Skąpska

cannot understand the city council's disdain for the estate as they greatly value their living conditions. Sylvie admits: "The residents know all these problems, but they also know how nice it is to live in this setting, with gardens and terraces, especially during the pandemic. It's true that this is a complicated housing estate, but that's exactly why we like living here".[18]

ARCHITECTURE VERSUS BUSINESS

The idea of demolishing "problematic" neighbourhoods in France, especially those with a predominance of social housing, is not new. The municipal authorities see this as a solution to social issues and an opportunity to make some money by selling valuable plots of land to private property developers. Flawed architectural concepts and the poor technical condition of the buildings are among the most common excuses. The authorities are legally obliged to provide the same number of social housing units within the municipal boundaries, but new investment in social housing is usually made in the outer districts. This way, problematic tenants are pushed out of the city centre and the construction sector can make a profit. Urban activists protest against this policy and architects such as Lacaton & Vassal, who campaign for the renovation of housing estates, prove that almost every estate is suitable for modernisation, often at a lower cost than demolition and redevelopment. This radical policy is also at odds with the environmental logic and sustainable development strategies that local authorities like to boast about.

The longer the owner remains inactive, the higher the cost of the necessary repairs, especially if saving unusual architecture requires unusual methods. a standard renovation budget will not suffice for La Pièce Pointue. The partial renovations that started in 2018 were unsatisfactory and inadequate, so they were quickly put on hold. Currently, 60 flats have been decommissioned due to their poor technical condition.

Today, the sale and demolition of La Pièce Pointue seems a way off. The new directors of Seine-Saint-Denis Habitat are considering renovating the estate. In November 2023, the owner announced new plans: the city officials want the renovations to be done by 2027 and will present the residents with detailed plans this summer.

Buczkowska's other projects also need saving. The gymnasium in Bobigny, which received many awards and was the culmination of the architect's explorations of the potential of vaulted wooden structures, has been under threat of demolition for many years, and the authorities of the Seine-Saint-Denis department have decided to build a new school on a neighbouring site. Les Longs Sillons in Ivry near Paris and Les Toits Rouges in Saint-Dizier (both housing estates) are awaiting renovation, but the planned work threatens the architectural integrity of these projects. Iwona's hands are tied. Between interviews and conference invitations, she writes letters in defence of her projects.

Contrary to the intentions of the municipal authorities, Cité Pierre Semard has become famous and its case is being analysed by the French Ministry of Culture. At a time when environmental discourse is no longer a trend but a necessity, preserving this pioneering wooden structure and conserving it wisely should be the natural choice. As you can see, even award-winning architecture can lose the battle against economic calculations and private interests.

Paradoxically, the threat of demolition may also have positive effects as it might speed up the procedure for granting La Pièce Pointue monument status. According to our data, this is the only case in France where the initiative to list a social housing estate as a monument came from its residents. France has a long tradition of remarkable social housing projects, many of which are already under conservatorial protection or have been granted the Architecture Contemporaine Remarquable[19] title. In most cases, these processes are initiated by heritage conservators and representatives of the architectural community, to the indifference or sometimes objection of their residents.

Véronique keeps a folder with various newspaper clippings and flyers about the estate and its affairs. She likes to show visitors around her flat. "We stick together to protect this type of architecture. We are lucky to live in such a unique place. We want our estate to be famous because we want to save it".[20]

TRANSLATED FROM POLISH BY NATALIA RACZKOWSKA

18 A. Arlot, *Seine-Saint-Denis: cité à rénover, collège à rebâtir... L'héritage controversé de l'architecture en bois*, Le Parisien, 1.12.2022, https://www.leparisien.fr/seine-saint-denis-93/seine-saint-denis-cite-a-renover- college-a-rebatir-lheritage-controverse-de-larchitecture-en-bois-01-12-2022-WDYH5OGRKNG-UJIKN3RFVR5E AGE.php (accessed: 29.04.2024).

19 Remarkable Contemporary Architecture. This title is awarded to French buildings that are less than a hundred years old and have outstanding architectural features. It has no legal status, but recognising the most valuable examples of contemporary architecture attracts public interest.

20 Quote from an interview conducted with Véronique for this article, April 2024.

A curatorial team of Hanna Skąpska, Dorota Jędruch and Ewelina Jaskulska is preparing an exhibition about Iwona Buczkowska's projects, planned to open in 2025.

STUCK IN MOTION

Trajectories of immobility and the migration experience

Las Raices camp in San Cristobal de la Laguna, Tenerife
Photo: Ignacio Fradejas-Garcia

Kinga Zemła

IN CONVERSATION WITH

Ignacio Fradejas-García

KINGA ZEMŁA:

Palestinian architect Sandi Hilal uses the dichotomy of permanent temporariness to describe the situation of refugees[1]. She refers to two seemingly contradictory temporalities: a temporary state of suspension and its constant prolongation over successive months, years, or even generations. When analysing the situation of people arriving in the Canary Islands via irregular sea routes, a different pair of contradictory terms is used: mobility–immobility. You study the European borders in the Canary Islands and diagnose five regimes of immobility which have enabled (predominantly in 2020–2021) the immobilization of migrants on the islands, which are visited by millions of tourists every year: humanitarian, exceptional, racist, carceral, and bureaucratic.

IGNACIO FRADEJAS-GARCÍA:

The of mobility–immobility dichotomy is a tool that allows us to grasp the network of connections between law, practice, and infrastructure. Although it does not function as a principled and coherent theoretical model, it organises these relations, arranging them in a story that reflects particular cases and events. It is applicable to regional and national levels, as well as to supranational institutions such as the European Union.

Migration is most often associated with movement and mobility – categories that are recognised and used to describe it in academic research. At the same time, border regions create a constant tension between movement and immobility. This was the case in the Canary Islands, first from mid-2020 to the end of 2021 and later, to a lesser extent, in 2022 and 2023. Instead of investigating mobility, I decided to focus on the experience of being immobilised. Why are migrants prevented from moving on? Were the measures used to enforce this a consequence of the pandemic chaos or an extension of practices that existed long before the pandemic? Enforced immobility is associated with a sense of drawn-out suspension, but I think that space, not time, is a key dimension of this experience. Immobility takes place in the physical realm. Borrowing from the anthropological concept of liminality, I would describe immobility as being "in transition" – neither here nor there, in an extended in-between.

KZ:

Before we talk about immobility in physical space, I would like to ask you about the imagined immobility. What is it like to experience and talk about immobility?

IFG:

There is a strong corelation between physical and existential immobility. The people who were stopped in the Canary Islands were not only prevented from reaching their destination, namely the Spanish mainland or Europe, but also from realising their plan to find a job and send their earnings home. They were within the administrative borders of Europe, but they could not feel it. They imagined Europe as a place of opportunity, social mobility, and existential advancement. Their dreams of improving their lives and those of their families seemed futile outside of Europe. The same ambitions and desires that had driven them during their perilous crossing now worked to their detriment, deepening their anxieties and hopelessness while they were immobilised. They were locked up in camps for months, breaking their own promises, which put them under even more pressure; we are talking mainly about young men here[2], many of whom were raised in the rigour of Islam. It is important to note that I am referring to their perception. In reality, when they were finally allowed to move to the Iberian Peninsula, they could not easily find work, make friends, get support. Unexpectedly, some of them decided to move back to the Canary Islands, where they had built relationships and friendships with locals during their enforced stay.

KZ:

In 2020, under pressure from the European Union, the Spanish government forced the Canary Islands – a former stopover on the irregular sea migration route from West Africa – to keep the migrants on their territory. As a result, they became infamous as the "prison islands" (*islas-cárcel*). In your article[3], you quote a lawyer as saying, "By shifting responsibility for migrants to the periphery, Spain has treated the Canary Islands in the same way that the European Union has treated Spain". After his visit to the detention camps, Spanish Ombudsman Francisco Fernández Marugán warned against using the EU's southern coast as a laboratory for experiments with international law. Did geographical distance enable this stretching of the law? How did the reception of migrants in this irregular situation in the Canary Islands differ from that on the Spanish mainland?

IFG:

First of all, pressure from the EU and the Spanish government led local officials to break the law of free movement between Spain's provinces. The province borders are open (with the exception of Ceuta and Melilla: Spanish enclaves in Morocco that have autonomous status) and a similar practice would be impossible on the continent. Nothing prevents one from travelling from Murcia to

1 *Fikcje tymczasowości*, Kinga Zemła in conversation with Sandi Hilal, „Autoportret" 2021, vol. 2 (73): *Przestrzenie troski*.

2 Due to the arduous and dangerous journey, almost 75% of the migrants in irregular situation are men. Women and men who reach the Canary Islands are separated from the men on arrival, even if they are travelling with their husbands or so-called travel husbands (temporary partners who protect the crossing which opens also space for exploitation). As women are vulnerable to additional forms of violence (especially human trafficking and forced prostitution), it is easier for them to be accepted at their destination, but once they reach the continent, they are placed in special, strictly supervised detention centres. Ignacio Fradejas-García was never allowed to speak to female migrants recently arrived and in irregular situations because the protection measures.

3 I. Fradejas-García, *Regímenes de in movilidad y crisis migratoria en la ruta canaria*, "Perifèria. Revista de Recerca i Formació en Antropologia" 2023, Vol. 28, Núm. 2, https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/periferia.931. The conversation is based on this article.

Catalonia, Galicia, or anywhere else. By excluding the Canary Islands, the country has acted against its own law.

KZ: **That is why this decision has caused a lot of controversy in the Canary Islands, and the local government has also raised objections.**

IFG: Unfortunately, the prevailing anti-immigration narrative influences policy at all levels: from EU institutions to national governments to regional officials. Even the most progressive policy makers have to make decisions with respect to public sentiment. There are prison islands all over the world, but the Canary Islands have never been one of them and have never wanted this status. The local population from all across the political spectrum has opposed the EU and the government. The right wanted immediate deportations, and the government tried to negotiate with some African countries, but without success. Other parties and islanders protested against the establishment of camps because they are dehumanising spaces. Eventually, the so-called Canarias Plan was introduced, which led to the opening of a network of macro-camps.

↘ The political conflict intensified the critical debate over the management of migration on the one hand, and it mobilised locals to help and support the new arrivals on the other.

KZ: **In your article, you point to some of the EU migration strategies – the closing of borders and the externalisation of responsibility for migrants to neighbouring countries – as factors that increase the risk of death and exploitation on the way to Europe.**

IFG: Agreements that place responsibility for migrants on African countries have been around for a long time, as has the closing of borders; the only difference is that Frontex now has greater resources at its disposal. In 2006, during the *Cayucos* crisis, the agency's budget amounted to approximately 5 million euros, whereas it now exceeds 900 million. In addition to the EU agreements, there are also bilateral contracts. Spain has signed such pacts with Senegal, Morocco, and Mauritania that form the basis for stricter border controls and police operations, as well as campaigns to discourage migration. Nevertheless, the number of migrants is increasing. I have met many people who have sworn that if they were deported, they would try to come to Europe again. If you close one migration route, another one pops up immediately. That is why I believe that the externalisation of migration policy serves at best to control rather than stop the flow of migrants in the region. Development funding has also proven to be ineffective. Studies show that improving the standard of living in a country leads to an increase in the number of people who can afford to and as a result decide to travel to Europe irregularly.

They risk far more than their lives on the journey. Travelling through Africa, the migrants take not only money with them but also their ability to work. Sometimes they are turned into a commodity. In Libya, migrants are held in makeshift prisons to extort ransom money from their families in their country of origin. In Mauritania and Morocco, they are forced to work for free or for a pittance in order to be allowed to continue their journey. Of course, a few of them decide to stay in the transit countries, but most of them dream of Europe and are determined to get here.

KZ: **What do you think the European Union should do?**

IFG: The only fair solution is to open safe, legal migration corridors, preferably by plane. Humanitarian organisations and migration researchers have been campaigning for this for years. These migration corridors would help to put an end to smuggling networks and dangerous routes and minimise the risk of death, illness and injury, loss of money and time. However, this concept is at odds with the EU's current migration policy.

KZ: **Your vision concerns the basic safety of migrants, but it is impossible to separate it from the question of their fate on the continent. Apart from the overburdened reception system, don't you think that legal channels would attract an immense number of migrants? Such a large influx could potentially exceed the capacity of EU member states to provide sufficient housing, labour, integration, etc.**

IFG: That is a difficult question. However, I think that the overriding imperative of European ethics – both religious and humanitarian – is to prevent and combat death and suffering, for which safe migration corridors are the only guarantee.

This solution points to the need to rethink the role of nation states and transnational institutions, as well as the existence and function of borders. I oppose the racist and colonial discourse of European modernity, including the attachment to whiteness and the fear of invasion, siege, or "great replacement".

KZ: **The tightening of EU migration policy is partly a consequence of the change in public opinion. I would divide the causes of the growing resentment towards migrants into two categories: the feeling of existential and cultural threat, and the economic burden. The former is usually used in national politics, suchas in**

the campaign before the 2015 Polish parliamentary elections. In relation to the latter, popular philosopher Byung-Chul Han writes that in a globalised world the metaphysical presence of the Other blurs and fades, leaving only weariness. Although his point of view could be seen as a concern for the future, it describes the situation in present day Sweden quite accurately. a few months after taking in the largest number of migrants and refugees *per capita* in the EU in 2015, the mainstream political parties performed a U-turn on Swedish migration policy. They argued that accepting more people into the country would prevent the government from maintaining the high quality of welfare, for both migrants and Swedes.

IFG: In my research, I focus on the south of Europe. Although I am not familiar with the Swedish conditions, I know that the people who come to our continent are primarily economic migrants, not refugees. They always say that they would rather stay in their countries with their families and friends than risk their lives, but they are desperate. They come from countries that are in a dire state, often due to neo-colonialism and the exploitation of local resources by, for example, European corporations. The people who come to Europe are predominantly of working age. The host countries do not bear the costs of their reproduction, upbringing, or education.

The new arrivals take jobs that the locals are unwilling to accept: poorly paid and physically demanding jobs which require inconvenient working hours and flexibility. In the early years, they avoid contact with the state system for fear of deportation, which means that they do not burden its institutions – they do not go to the doctor or use public facilities. Not to judge this situation, I believe it is highly questionable to consider them an economic burden. The European population is ageing, and we need people who can enter the workforce. No government that cares about its image will openly invite economic migrants, so they let them in quietly, as Spain has done in the past two years. The basis of the anti-immigration policy is really the fear that "they" will replace "us". This is proven by the fact that we have welcomed Ukrainian refugees – who are closer to us in terms of race, culture, and religion – with open arms. In my opinion, it is enough to put hard empirical data on the table to determine whether the issue is the potential economic burden or racism.

KZ: **The Polish right-wing government cynically played the tough anti-immigration card in domestic politics, while at the same time issuing a record number of temporary residence permits to people from outside the West, although unemployment in Poland is relatively low compared to the 11.5 percent in Spain.**

IFG: In Spain, an estimated 500 thousand people live without papers, work informally, and do not pay taxes, which is economically damaging for the state. Recently, a citizens' initiative collected 700 thousand signatures on a petition to regulate the residence of unregistered migrants. It is important to note that the people in question could not sign the petition themselves. In the history of my country, there have been only a few petitions successful enough to collect more than the 500 thousand signatures required to initiate a parliamentary debate. As far as unemployment is concerned, a lot depends on the region. In Almería, for example, there is strong anti-immigrant sentiment, but many migrants are able to find informal employment in agriculture due to labour shortages.

KZ: **The employment structure is certainly important when discussing the economic burden. However, I must add that Sweden has taken in many underage or uneducated migrants, so the government pays attention to the cost of preparing them for the job market. Since it was during the pandemic that migrants started to be forced to stay in the Canary Islands, I would like to talk about one of the regimes of immobility that you outlined in your article: the exceptional regime. In the decade before the pandemic, between one and two thousand migrants reached the Canary Islands by sea every year. In 2020, the number skyrocketed to 23 thousand, and in 2021 it dropped by just one thousand. The situation was labelled a crisis, understandably so, except for the fact that when 31 and 34 thousand people came to the Canaries in 2022 and 2023[4], respectively, the term "crisis" was no longer applied. The reception system has also changed. Since 2022, migrants no longer spend months on end in camps but are allowed to continue their journey to the continent after a few weeks.**

IFG: The label "crisis" makes it easier to present certain topics in the media and in public discourse. Crises are created to achieve particular goals and are abandoned when they are no longer useful. Since they are treated so instrumentally, one has to ask who they benefit and in what way? All parties involved speculate on the crisis[5]: European institutions, governments and political parties; the African countries that refuse to receive the deportees, using the pandemic as an excuse; but also the Canary Islands, which play the "migrant overload" card, the local community that mobilises to help, and even the migrants, who demand that their rights be respected.

4 In addition, more than nine thousand people died during attempted crossings between 2018 and 2023.

5 See a recent article on the topic published by Ignacio and Kristín: Fradejas-García, I., & Loftsdóttir, K., *Speculating about the migration crisis: acting from above and below on the Canary Islands route*, Third World Quarterly, 2024, pp. 1–20, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2024.2346623.

KZ: **If the state of emergency allows the use of emergency measures – for example, breaking the law on freedom of movement – then I wonder whether any of those will be upheld when the crisis ends.**

IFG: I'm afraid not, but at that time racial profiling at airports was stepped up and is still used, albeit less frequently. During the pandemic, black travellers were stopped for additional checks to filter out migrants whose status is unknown and prevent them from travelling to mainland Spain. This method provoked a certain backlash from the migrants and the activist lawyers who support them and are involved in strategic processing. This means winning certain lawsuits in an attempt to highlight harmful procedures and force changes. One such lawsuit was won by a black resident of Tenerife who, despite presenting his travel documents, was stopped for a lengthy additional check, causing him to miss his flight.

Migrants are aware of these obstacles and have become very inventive. a popular strategy is to wear smart and expensive clothes to the airport so as to look like a member of the upper class. This greatly reduces the likelihood of being stopped by the police. I once witnessed such an attempt, which, I might add, was successful. a migrant friend of mine came to the airport wearing a groom's suit.

Migrants are often brought to the airport by their new friends from the islands. The presence of locals means that they go through the standard rather than the extended security check.

KZ: **The carceral regime seems to be the most dubious of the five: preventive detention on the basis of flimsy evidence.**

IFG: In many places around the world, racialized migrants are disproportionately persecuted and incarcerated compared to locals. Punishment is a measure to discipline those convicted and discourage others. This tactic is used by both Frontex and the Spanish police. Of course, each case is different, but the way in which the uniformed services operate in the border-adjacent regions has stirred many controversies, especially in cases involving minors. The police and border guards seem to want to prove that they are cracking down on human traffickers and trying to bring those responsible for deaths on the sea route to justice. Unfortunately, similar to Lesbos and Lampedusa, their zeal sometimes turns into a search for a scapegoat among new arrivals.

KZ: **Ultimately, the traffickers are not so keen to risk drowning and usually don't get on the boats with the migrants.**

IFG: Even more concerning are the screening interviews conducted by Frontex agents, where neither lawyers nor other independent observers are present. They have been criticised by the EU Ombudswoman, Emily O'Reilly, among others. As I and my colleague Kristín Loftsdóttir have learned from the accounts of migrants and their lawyers, Frontex agents persuade some of them to accuse a fellow traveller who shows charisma or strong leadership skills of, for example, being the leader of the boat and thus a member of a smuggling network. We often hear these stories, but we have no proof. There was a case where a migrant was accused of human trafficking because he had a picture of a list of travellers in his phone. The pattern repeats itself: the evidence is too weak, while the accusations are serious.

▩ Las Raices camp in Tenerife
Photo: Ignacio Fradejas-Garcia

↓ Las Canteras camp in Tenerife
Photo: Ignacio Fradejas-Garcia

KZ: **Plan Canarias was introduced in February 2021. Macro-camps for migrants were set up on the islands, housing from a few hundred to two thousand people. You say that this infrastructure constitutes part of the humanitarian immobility regime.**

IFG: I refer to William Walters' concept of the "humanitarian border". The humanitarian infrastructure built as part of the Canarias Plan was intended to keep migrants alive on the one hand, but on the other it served as a space of filtration, detention, and immobility.

↘ The Spanish government finances the construction and operation of the camps but outsources the administration to non-profit organisations. This allows a humanitarian system to exist within but separately from the state system.

This is done against the will of the local authorities and the community. Access to the camps is restricted, which was initially excused by the pandemic but has been maintained to this day. For a few months after the macro-camps were opened, the only person allowed in was the Spanish Ombudsman, who criticised the conditions. I applied for authorisation to enter a few times until last year, but it was never granted. I have spoken to employees of the camp, but outside working hours, and to the residents, but outside the camp (they are allowed to leave, but only during the day). Excessive discretion is always a cause for concern because if there is nothing to hide, why are they so cautious?

Most of the migrants who arrived on the island in summer 2020 were initially accommodated in hotels that were closed during the pandemic. This decision was controversial in Spain, especially in communities that are against migration. Tourism is in crisis while migrants are being housed in hotels with swimming pools, and it's all being paid for by Spanish taxpayers? Soon the people were relocated to macro-camps. Since nobody invited them here, and they are black and follow a different religion, apparently they don't deserve anything above the bare existence minimum.

KZ: **There was a lot of media buzz around the infamous Las Raíces camp near San Cristóbal de La Laguna on Tenerife.**

IFG: Two camps, Las Raíces and Las Canteras, were set up on the outskirts of La Laguna. You have lived on Tenerife for a few months, so you know the area. Mountains, lush forests, an exceptionally cold and humid microclimate – little in common with the Tenerife we know from postcards. Las Canteras was well managed by IOM (International Organization for Migration), and it is better located and easier to reach from La Laguna. Unfortunately, Las Raíces, which was managed by ACCEM (Asociación Comisión Católica Española de Migración), is far from good in terms of both internal organisation and its geographical location. The route to La Laguna is long and arduous, while in the immediate vicinity of the camp there is only an airport, an active military base, and a prison.

There are huge tents in the camps, each housing 20 to 40 people. The residents do not know each other as they are rarely housed in the same tent as their fellow travellers from the same boat. They have to queue for everything. The last ones in the queue for the shower have no chance of getting hot water. The food is of poor quality, but cooking is forbidden due to the fire risk. The facilities are guarded and locked at night and the residents are not allowed to leave after dark. At its peak, two thousand people lived in the camp. Social distancing was impossible during the pandemic. There is no privacy, but also no meeting spaces.

KZ: **The migrants often carry traumatic memories of their journey. The conditions you describe do not really contribute to the healing of traumas but rather cultivate them.**

IFG: These are ticking time bombs. Melting pots of nationalities, languages, histories, exhaustion, and disillusionment. Some people fled the camp and ended up on the street. Around 60 people set up an anti-camp opposite Las Raíces to draw attention to the terrible conditions. Their decision prompted locals to create a platform through which they organised daily support: they cooked and brought meals, clothes, camping equipment and medicines; they gave Spanish lessons, helped the migrants with translations, obtain their documents, and deal with bureaucracy. Some simply offered their company and friendship – spending time with the migrants, showing them around the island. Doctors offered medical advice. Most of the anti-camp residents returned to the official facilities because if they participated in the official reception system, they could try to get to continental Europe easily. In the end, the protest also benefitted those who remained in the camp. With the support of volunteers and islanders, many of them were better received outside the camp than inside. They made friends and built relationships. Help is still being organised, with locals bringing clothes and other necessities, offering lifts, and so on.

KZ: **Were the islanders open towards the migrants?**

IFG: Yes. Of course, there were some cases of xenophobia and sexual exploitation (some locals offered basic necessities or services, such as a lift or pocket money, in exchange for sex), but by and large the island communities were supportive of the migrants, despite the problems they themselves face on a daily basis. The Canary

Islands are a peculiar community. There are many families with a history of migration, especially to and from Latin America. I think that is why people here are so empathetic: it's easy for them to walk in other people's shoes. Like when they helped Ousmane, a 16-year-old boy from Senegal, who left his home country in a rubber dinghy. Many people died on this crossing, but he survived. As he had no documents, he was considered an adult and placed in one of the macro-camps. Outside, he met a Canarian family who decided to take him in. They taught him Spanish and today Ousmane speaks fluently with a Canarian accent. They sent him to school. I know many examples of individualised help, especially when it comes to taking in or even adopting underage migrants. I think these are exceptionally beautiful, humane acts. The islanders made these decisions despite the risk involved.

Plan Canarias politicised aid. The islanders were against it, so their mobilisation was an act of resistance against the camps and the conditions inside. Many of those involved were not activists; some had never dealt with migrants before. I mentioned the surprising returns from the Iberian Peninsula – I believe that the relationships forged in the Canarias played a key role here.

KZ: **The influx of migrants has reached such a serious level that the state must take responsibility for organising their reception. At the same time, your account proves that the role of the local community and its involvement is invaluable for the integration process. What would be the best model?**

IFG: First of all, we should not open camps where hundreds or thousands of people live in large tents, in poor conditions, and in regions that are difficult to access. Instead, I would suggest distributing small groups of people in regular towns, among the locals. That would give the migrants an opportunity to settle down and would also be a chance for the local communities to recognize them as people with their own stories and experiences – not as a nameless mass of black strangers locked up in a camp deep in the woods. I do not think this would be beyond the logistical capabilities of the islands, which receive thousands of tourists every day. The migrants often do not speak the language; they have no money and no work. They cannot be left to fend for themselves, otherwise they will end up on the streets or with the same organisations that manage the camps. a reception system needs to be set up – we just need to design it better.

KZ: **The last of the regimes of immobility is the bureaucratic regime. Bureaucratic procedures filter and immobilize migrants. I question the intentions behind the obstacles they create. The bureaucratic system can be changed; it is a question of political will, but it remains uncertain whether the change would be beneficial or detrimental to the migrants.**

IFG: Bureaucracy immobilises all of us, even if only for a limited time. We can criticise it for slowing us down and delaying us, but as David Graeber writes in *The Utopia of rules*, it is contradictory because we miss it when bureaucratic rules do not organise our social life[6]. The same is true for migration: the bureaucratic system creates barriers, filters the migrants, stops or hinders their mobility, but we simply cannot imagine how to do without it. The system does not deliberately immobilise but is rather completely unsuited to the migrants' situation. Changes imposed from above would only exacerbate the chaos. Therefore, I believe that the changes should be introduced from below – by the practitioners of the bureaucracy in order to point out inconsistencies in specific cases.

KZ: **Illiterate and uneducated people who do not speak any European languages cannot deal with bureaucratic procedures on their own.**

IFG: Other migrants or volunteers usually help them to translate and fill out forms. Of course, people who have even a low level of education will have a better chance of improving their standard of living. In their countries of origin, people from lower classes have no access to education, which in theory leads to social exclusion. In practice, however, it is usually they who enter the job market sooner, as they offer physical labour and have relatively low expectations. Migrants are best absorbed in economic sectors that are shunned by Europeans.

I once accompanied a group of fishermen. They couldn't find work in their own countries because corporations had overfished the coastal waters with their large ships. They were looking for similar work on the islands, where there is a shortage of labour in this sector. They needed documents to complete the necessary training. I helped them fill out the paperwork (fishermen who knew a European language also helped) and introduced them to a representative from a relevant office. Most of them were admitted to a one-week basic training programme that enabled them to start working on fishing boats. Unfortunately, an issue came up in the form of a three-week-long health and safety course with practice out at sea, as is mandatory for prospective members of fishing crews. The list of requirements was expanded shortly before, with skills such as the ability to swim and knowledge of spoken and written Spanish. Although locals are not interested in the course because few of them want to work on a fishing boat, the language clause was added for two reasons: the job listing attracted the attention of too many migrants and it would be difficult to run such a course if the participants could not understand the lecturers.

KZ: **We see migrants as victims of circumstances – passive and dependent on the goodwill of others. Sandi Hilal proposes expanding this partially true picture. She believes that migrants carry with them**

6 D. Graeber, *The Utopia of rules. On technology, stupidity, and the secret joys of bureaucracy*, New York: Melville House, 2016.

a baggage of unique experiences – crossing borders, living outside their nation states – which could be understood as the lifestyle of a global citizen, which some see as very futuristic. Hilal gives migrants back their subjectivity and agency and believes that we can learn a lot from them. You have been researching migration for many years and have met and spoken to many migrants. I assume this is a familiar perspective?

IFG: I agree. However I think we need to balance the contrasting elements of migrants' situation. Viewing them through an unnecessarily exalted, cosmopolitan lens is not particularly convincing. Migrants have the ability to become subjects, even in a political sense, but this is not universally true. Sometimes this ability changes on a daily basis. They are people like us – just in completely different circumstances. They tell ordinary stories, have dreams and goals.

I lean towards recognising the autonomy of migration. I believe that the agency one has in the act of migration goes far beyond any anti- or pro-migration policy. It manifests itself in tireless attempts to follow one's own – often creative – paths, despite all obstacles.

Kristín Loftsdóttir and I will soon publish an article[7] in which we refer to the idea of infrapolitics, coined by James Scott. We understand infrapolitics as an aggregate of minor acts of resistance by individuals who work under institutional pressure and are unable to protest openly. It refers to the everyday resistance that is often overlooked and whose political power is only recognised when considered in its entirety. We have already talked about some examples: gestures by migrants, but also by volunteers, lawyers, activists, local communities. There are many ways to move forward and realise your dreams – direct political confrontation is just one of them. I see perseverance in everyday life as a real way to move forward and improve one's conditions in the long term, even if it is less photogenic than protests and demonstrations. To understand migration processes, we need to observe the people who shape them through their day-to-day actions: when looking for and finding a job, when building friendships, when starting or bringing their families, when integrating into the community.

KZ: **So it is the agency of overcoming mobility – of moving forward in the existential sense?**

IFG: Yes, and mobility brings with it uncertainty. Movement always puts us in an uncertain position, makes us prepare for the unexpected. If someone finds uncertainty unbearable and wants to have everything under control, they prefer not to move; such behaviour could be described as desired immobility. Migration is the desire to move, but it does not compensate for the uncertainty. You and I know its weight because we have both experienced migration. You understand how necessary it is to learn to tolerate uncertainty. The ability to choose mobility or immobility – to move or stop at will – is a privilege.

Irregular migration often forces movement or a lack thereof, which is why a migrant's success depends in part on their ability to tolerate uncertainty. Many variables play a role here: whether the migrant speaks a European language and is able to communicate with others; whether they are able to apply for asylum and international protection; how their journey went, how traumatic it was; whether they have built a relationship with their fellow travellers. People react differently, some need medicalisation and psychiatric help, some attempt suicide. Others manage to muster the strength to push through the uncertain fate, over and over again, day after day. I don't like the term "resilience", but I will use it here as it illustrates the problem quite well: resilience to the possibility of being deported. I see the most powerful manifestation of migrants' resistance and agency in the iron will to accept uncertainty and forge ahead.

TRANSLATED FROM POLISH BY NATALIA RACZKOWSKA

7 Fradejas-García, I., and Loftsdóttir, K. *Infra-political Mobilities: Precarious Migrants and Resistance to European Rules of Mobility*. Focaal, Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology, 99. Accepted, forthcoming.

Migrants playing football in the Las Raices camp in San Cristobal de la Laguna, Tenerife, 18 May 2023
Photo: Juan Carlos Lucas/NurPhoto via Getty Images

“CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURES” EXHIBITION

Critical infrastructure is, by definition, crucial to the functioning of society and the economy. If it is threatened, a crisis situation can arise. Infrastructure can be considered a network that “feeds” society resources that it to some extent depends on. This in turn renders infrastructure an instrument of power. Threatening to stop the flow of “nutrients” through infrastructure becomes a strong political argument. Despite its often robust physical form, on closer inspection critical infrastructure reveals itself to be a fragile web of interdependencies. One example of such infrastructure is the Druzhba pipeline, officially opened sixty years ago, in 1964. It was built between 1961 and 1971 and connects Russia with locations in Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

The artist couple of Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas has been researching the Druzhba pipeline since 2003. For them, the several thousand kilometres of the pipeline are a physical manifestation of the distribution and organisation of power relations that change over time and in space.

Tytus Szabelski-Różniak views infrastructure in a similar way, as a tool for building trade relations and for waging conflict. Szabelski-Różniak’s photographs show a section of the pipeline running from Siberia to refineries in Płock (Poland) and Schwedt (Germany). The photography series is accompanied by Hubert Karmiński’s music composition incorporating recordings of the local soundscape.

Jiří Žák and Rado Ištok examine the involvement of the former Czechoslovakia in the construction of foreign oil infrastructure. Žák and Ištok’s video installation draws on archival material and focuses on a critical moment related to the unbuilt refinery in Daura.

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Artists: Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas, Tytus Szabelski-Różniak, Jiří Žák and Rado Ištok
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BLACK BILLIONS

Basra, Baiji, and Beyond. Czechoslovak Oil Refineries in Iraq

TEXT

Rado Ištok

Boilermakers Jiri Harvich (Czechoslovakia) and Le Due Hoa (Vietnam) assembling parts of a stripping tower for a refinery in Iraq
Photo: Jan Tachezy, CTK

↙ Oil refinery built by Czechoslovakia in Basra, southern Iraq. The inauguration ceremony was attended by a Czechoslovak government delegation led by Minister of Metallurgy and Heavy Industry Josef Simon. The photo depicts Josef Simon (second to the right) and engineer Leopold Skoumal, director of Chepos Brno, during their tour of the refinery
Photo: Jiri Krulis, CTK

Last November, the Czech newspaper *Hospodářské noviny* informed its readers that the largest Czech petrochemical concern, Orlen Unipetrol, had confirmed that, after three weeks of testing, its oil refinery in Litvínov was able to successfully replace oil from Russia with a blend of non-Russian crude oils. During the tests, the refinery processed oil from Iraq and Guyana, planning to also test blends of oils from the Middle East and the North Sea in the following months.[1] Currently, the EU ban on imports of Russian crude oil (since 5 December 2022) and petroleum products (since 5 February 2023) only applies to maritime oil transport[2], which means that Russian crude oil imported via pipelines to countries such as the Czech Republic is subject to an exemption. This exception is, however, bound to expire by the end of 2024, which is why petrochemical concerns such as Orlen Unipetrol are investing billions of Czech crowns in adapting their oil refineries to non-Russian oil.

While the October tests were the first time that Iraqi oil had been refined in Litvínov, Czech companies have built an estimated 50–60% of Iraq's oil infrastructure and have a long history of refining Iraqi oil there. In the 1970s and 1980s, Czechoslovakia was one of Iraq's three most important business partners among the socialist countries;[3] conversely, Iraq was one of Czechoslovakia's three most important economic partners in the Middle East.[4] From trade with Iraq, socialist Czechoslovakia was able to obtain an active balance of roughly one hundred million dollars in free currency or re-exportable oil every year.

In this essay, I will focus on three oil refineries designed by Czech companies in Iraq in the 1970s and 1980s: the refineries at Basra in southern Iraq, Baiji in northern Iraq, and Daura in Baghdad. Each of them represents a phase of rise or decline in the changing economic and political relations between Czechoslovakia and Iraq since the 1970s.

The title of this essay is borrowed from Czech journalist and author Jiří Hronek's 1976 book *Černé miliardy* [Black billions], which offered Czechoslovak readers both a historical overview of oil extraction and processing as well as the current political context. In the chapter *Socialistické země a třetí svět* [Socialist countries and the Third World], Hronek wrote:

> Currently, the Arab countries of North Africa, and the Middle East in particular, see the key to their industrial development in the management of their own natural wealth, especially oil, at all stages – from extraction, through refining, to transport and sale. For a long time, Western monopolistic companies were able to control their economic empires with a kind of technological dictatorship resulting from their technological superiority. (...) With the help of the USSR, the first national oil industry was established in Iraq in 1972 with an annual production of 18 million tonnes. Work is now underway to expand it, with the prospect of processing 42 million tonnes a year. With Czechoslovak assistance, a large petrochemical plant was built in Basra and handed over in 1974.[5]

This development was also closely observed from the other side of the Iron Curtain. According to the Petroleum Section of the CIA memorandum "Recent trends in communist economic and military aid to Iraq" of March 1972, "Since mid-1969, communist countries have allocated Iraq's oil industry a minimum of 245 million dollars in aid".[6] According to this memorandum, the USSR alone provided at least 170 million dollars, while the other socialist countries extended about 75 million dollars in credit after 1969, including Czechoslovakia, which provided 27 million dollars for the refinery at Basra, which produced 70 thousand barrels of petroleum products per day. "Although communist-aided oil projects are still largely in their initial stages, work is moving ahead rapidly", concluded the memorandum.[7]

1 P. Zenkner, *Rafinerie v Litvínově prošla testem, že dokáže nahradit ropu z Ruska. Orlen Unipetrol ale bude muset investovat několik miliard*, "Hospodářské noviny", 6.11.2023, https://archiv.hn.cz/c1-67262010-rafinerie-v-litvinove-prosla-testem-ze-dokaze-nahradit-ropu-z-ruska-orlen-unipetrol-ale-bude-muset-investovat-nekolik-miliard (accessed: 12.03.2024).

2 *EU sanctions against Russia explained*, European Council and Council of the European Union, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-russia-over-ukraine/sanctions-against-russia-explained/ (accessed: 12.03.2024).

3 Ł. Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*, Princeton University Press, 2020, p. 213.

4 P. Zídek, K. Sieber, *Československo a Blízký východ v letech 1948–1989*, Praha: Ústav mezinárodních vztahů EU, 2009, p. 102.

5 J. Hronek, *Černé miliardy*, Prague: Mladá fronta, 1976, pp. 209–210. Translated by the author.

6 *Intelligence memorandum: Recent trends in communist economic and military aid to Iraq*, March 1972, anitized copy approved for release 18.01.2011, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00875R001700030031-3.pdf (accessed: 5.01.2024).

7 Ibid.

ACT 1: BASRA

The oil refinery at Basra in southern Iraq was put into operation on a trial basis on 7 April 1974. The opening ceremony was attended by a Czechoslovak government delegation led by Josef Šimon, the Minister of Metallurgyand Heavy Industry, accompanied by Leopold Skoumal, the director of Chepos Brno. During the socialist period, the companies grouped under Chepos built a number of oil refineries in Czechoslovakia, the USSR, Turkey, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq, as well as breweries and sugar refineries in, e.g., Czechoslovakia, the USSR, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Syria, Iran, China, as well as other biotechnological plants.[8] According to contemporaneous news reports, the Basra refinery was the largest technological investment unit that Czechoslovakia had exported to Iraq and built on a turnkey basis, having a total value of 62 million dollars and 1,200 Czechoslovak workers on site.[9] The news reports did not mention the considerable delay and budget overrun. As historians Petr Zídek and Karel Sieber put it, among the often delayed and troubled deliveries of Czechoslovak investment units for export, the Basra refinery was perhaps the biggest mess. While the contract signed on 9 April 1970 stipulated that the refinery was to be completed in 28 months, i.e., in 1972, it was not handed over until 1974, two years late. Moreover, a report submitted to President Gustáv Husák in 1972 also stated that "The manner in which the project has been managed, from the initial negotiations in 1969 to the current state, shows signs of reprehensible negligence and lack of experience on the part of the organisations involved and the employees responsible"[10], that the Prime Minister's Office received incorrect and incomplete material from the ministries, and that the negotiated price far underestimated the actual costs. As of 15 June 1972, the construction budget was exceeded by 32.3 million dollars plus 416.2 million Czechoslovak crowns, and the financial loss surpassed one billion crowns. The total financial loss was not disclosed. Despite this outcome, Czechoslovakia was awarded contracts for two more Iraqi oil refineries in the following years. a contract for the Basra II refinery worth 24 million dollars was signed in February 1972, and a contract for the Salahuddin I refinery in Baiji worth 130 million dollars was signed in November 1978.[11]

The peak of Czechoslovak–Iraqi political relations was marked by the official visit of the Czechoslovak President Gustáv Husák and his wife Viera to Iraq from 30 May to 2 June 1977. The delegation included the Deputy Prime Minister, Josef Šimon (the former Minister of Metallurgy and Heavy Industry, whom we already know from Basra); the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bohuslav Chňoupek; Arabist Luboš Kropáček as interpreter; plus, eleven bodyguards, eighteen journalists, and a team from Czechoslovak television, who recorded the visit on film.[12] During their time in Iraq, the delegation met with all the important political figures, with the exception of Vice President Saddam Hussein, who was ill at the time and in the care of Czech and Soviet doctors. As a result of the visit, the credit framework of the 1972 economic agreement was increased from 50 to 100 million dollars, while the share of oil in Czechoslovak imports was increased from 80 to 90% of the volume. The oil could be re-exported to any country until the completion of the Adria pipeline in Yugoslavia. Iraqi oil was thus the subject of the so-called petrobarter – the exchange of goods and services for crude oil. Although oil was allowed to be re-exported due to the lack of proper infrastructure, at times this led to economic speculation. As Łukasz Stanek summarised,

> Long-term contracts, which often accompanied barter agreements, shielded those in the transactions from the fluctuation of prices on the world market. For example, by the second half of the 1970s, the Soviet Union continued to exchange its military equipment for Iraqi oil based on prices from before they spiked (1973). Consequently, when the Soviets started to resell this oil to the West and to profit from the higher prices, relations with Iraq became strained. This latter practice was common, and the bulk of oil imported from the Middle East to most Eastern European countries was not used for domestic consumption but for reexport to Western Europe in exchange for convertible currency. This procedure was practiced by the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland (after 1980), and Hungary.[13]

Despite President Husák's official visit to Baghdad, political relations with Iraq were far from frictionless. As Zídek and Sieber noted, from the mid-1970s onwards the Ba'athist regime in Iraq resumed the repression of the opposition forces, namely the communists and the Kurds. In 1975, a law was passed that persecuted Iraqi citizens who studied abroad without the government's knowledge, targeting especially those who received scholarships from the Communist Party of Iraq to study in socialist countries in Europe (including Czechoslovakia). In 1978, President Husák wrote a letter to the Iraqi President Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr protesting the execution of twenty-one Iraqi soldiers accused of plotting a communist coup.[14]

8 *Historie*, Chepos, http://www.cheposas.cz/historie.html (accessed: 5.01.2024).

9 *0670420034 Basra – rafinerie ropy*, ČTK Fotobanka, https://www.profimedia.cz/0670420034 (accessed: 5.01.2024).

10 As quoted in P. Zídek, K. Sieber, *Československo…*, op. cit., pp. 102–103.

11 P. Zídek, K. Sieber, *Československo…*, op. cit., pp. 102–103.

12 Ibid., p. 104.

13 Ł. Stanek, *Architecture…*, op. cit., p. 226.

14 P. Zídek, K. Sieber, *Československo…*, op. cit., pp. 104–105.

15 Ł. Stanek, *Architecture…*, op. cit., p. 170.

16 P. Zídek, K. Sieber, *Československo…*, op. cit., pp. 104–105.

17 Ibid., p. 106.

18 Ibid., pp. 102–104.

19 N. Raydan, *Iraq 1980: Strategy for Oil Exports to Europe, and the Threat of US Stockpiles*, The Chokepoint, 2.03. 2023, https://chokepoint.substack.com/p/iraq-1980-strategy-for-oil-exports (accessed: 23.03.2024).

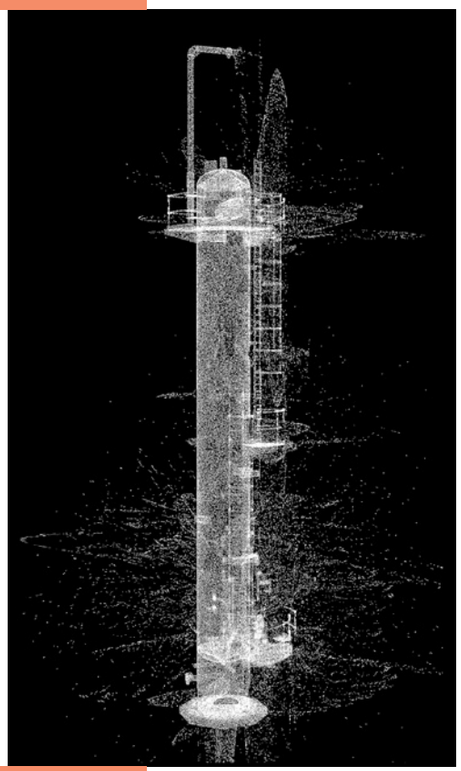
20 Ibid.

21 P. Zídek, K. Sieber, *Československo…*, op. cit., pp. 104–107.

22 Ibid., p. 109

23 *0750706655 dělník, Vietnamec, kotlář, stripovací kolona*, ČTK Fotobanka, https://www.profimedia.cz/0750706655 (accessed: 15.03.2024).

24 H. Čápová, *Detektivka jménem Technoexport*, Investigace.cz, 8.03.2021 https://www.investigace.cz/detektivka-j-menem-technoexport/ (accessed: 18.03.2024).



Economically, "[B]y the end of the decade", Stanek writes, "with the Iraqi market gradually open and attractive to international actors, enterprises from socialist countries working in Iraq were increasingly competing against Western firms that looked for opportunities beyond recession-hit Western Europe and North America".[15] Japan in particular was considered serious competition in Iraq, but Czechoslovakia's position in the Iraqi market remained strong due to its role as a leading arms manufacturer and exporter.[16] President Husák's state visit in December 1977 was followed by the visit of the Minister of National Defence, Martin Dzúr, and from 1977 until the beginning of the Iran–Iraq war in September 1980 the Czechoslovak company Omnipol received contracts for arms exports to Iraq worth 153.7 million dollars.[17]

ACT 2: BAIJI

In November 1978, Prime Minister Lubomír Štrougal visited Iraq, and in the same month a contract was signed for the Salahuddin I refinery in Baiji for 130 million dollars.[18] The construction of Salahuddin I, completed in 1983, and Salahuddin II, completed a year later, paralleled the Iraqi Oil Ministry's plan to more than double crude oil production from 3.7 million barrels per day in 1980 to 8 million by the end of 1983 in order to meet the demand of the "Big Seven" Western oil importers, including France, Italy, the UK, and Japan. Nevertheless, more than half of Iraq's crude oil was still exported to the "Third World, the Eastern bloc, and Other,"[19] while oil exports to Western Europe were used as political leverage and made conditional on a reduction in trade with Israel and South Africa. "During that period", writes researcher Noam Raydan, "Baghdad was also working on a strategy to aid 'liberation forces' active in African countries such as Mozambique and focused on economic relations with northern and southern Africa, according to then-deputy Minister of Oil, Abdel-Jabbar Hassan".[20] The construction of the Salahuddin I and II refineries was, however, marked by the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988), following Saddam Hussein's rise to power as 5th President and Prime Minister of Iraq in July 1979. Although Czechoslovakia was initially reluctant to continue supplying Iraq with weapons after the outbreak of war, arms exports were resumed following authorization from Moscow.[21] As a reward, Czechoslovakia received concessions in the construction sector in 1981, including a contract for the Salahuddin II refinery worth 150 million dollars. The Iran–Iraq War not only presented business opportunities but also posed a threat to the lives of Czechoslovak experts in Iraq. In October 1980, after a partial evacuation of women and children, there were still 900 Czechoslovak citizens in Iraq, 700 of whom worked at the Salahuddin I refinery. In order to maintain the international commissions in Iraq after the end of the war, Czechoslovak Ambassador Jan Straka managed to enforce a pragmatic stance of keeping the Czechoslovak experts in Iraq during the war. In the end, Czechoslovakia was one of the last countries to evacuate the majority of its experts at the end of 1980. Another wave of evacuations came in March 1985, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared a level II alert for the whole of Iraq.[22] Probably for this reason, the construction of the Salahuddin refineries was not reported in the Czechoslovak media. The only photographs related to the refineries appear to be those taken in October 1979, before the onset of the war, at the machine factory in Hradec Králové, where the dehydrator neck chambers and stripping towers were welded and assembled. According to these photos' caption, which emphasizes the timely delivery of export commissions, the assembly of the stripping towers was carried out by boilermaker Jiří Harvich, together with Le Due Hoa, a Vietnamese boilermaker who was trained in Hradec Králové.[23]

One of the Czech experts working on the construction of the Salahuddin refinery was the chemist Tomáš Plachý, a graduate of the University of Chemistry and Technology in Prague and employee of Technoexport, a state-owned foreign trade company which he eventually bought in 2009. In 1983, Plachý was recruited as an informant by Státní bezpečnost [State Security], the secret police in socialist Czechoslovakia, and tasked with reporting on his colleagues and obtaining technical documentation of an oil refinery built in Baiji by Technoexport's Japanese competitors. While Státní bezpečnost evaluated Plachý's reports as subjective, tendentious, and misleading, often with the aim of harming colleagues with whom he happened to be in conflict,[24] it remains unclear to what extent he succeeded in spying on the Japanese competitors, who continued to threaten Czechoslovak interests in Iraq until 1989.

Jiři Žak, *Raffinery*, work presented at *Critical infrastructure* exhibition, VI PER Gallery, Prague

ACT 3: BAGHDAD

In the mid-1980s, shortly after the completion of the Salahuddin II refinery, Technoexport was seeking a new contract for an oil refinery, this time for the Midland Refinery in Daura on the southern outskirts of Baghdad, where the company had already participated in the construction of a kerosene hydrotreating unit in 1969.[25]

At the same time, the economic situation in Iraq had started to show the first signs of deteriorating, which led to several months of deferred payments and, ultimately, to a lengthy and mostly unsuccessful debt collection process.[26] During his visit to Prague in August 1985, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tariq Aziz confirmed Iraq's interest in economic cooperation with Czechoslovakia, but they warned of the country's complicated economic situation, while Czechoslovak Prime Minister Lubomír Štrougal assured them of the continued interest in the long-term export of investment units, such as oil refineries, with a perspective until the year 2000. A few months later, Prime Minister Štrougal flew to Baghdad, where he met with the Deputy Secretary of State Taha Yasin Ramadan and President Saddam Hussein himself and agreed on a loan of 500 million dollars for further arms supplies, assuring his partners that the weapons delivered to Syria and Libya would not be passed on to third parties, namely Iran. The following year, Iraqi Deputy Secretary Taha Yasin Ramadan visited Czechoslovakia and signed a general agreement on economic, scientific, and technical cooperation that also stipulated the conditions for loans granted to Iraq for the import of investment units and arms, including the postponement of part of the instalments due in 1987 until 1990.[27]

In September 1989, following an international tender, the representatives of Czechoslovak Technoexport and the Iraqi authorities finally signed a Letter of Intent regarding the supply of parts for the construction of the planned Midland Refinery in Daura worth 185 million dollars, of which 50 million was to be financed as a commercial loan. However, during his official visit to Iraq in October 1989 – a month before the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia and several months before the Gulf War in Iraq and Kuwait – Czechoslovak Prime Minister Ladislav Adamec postponed the signing of the contract until the end of the year. Representatives of Technoexport, who were members of the delegation led by Adamec, hastily managed to extend the validity of the Letter of Intent until the end of October, after which the commission would be offered to a Japanese competitor, which would potentially lead to the loss of Czechoslovakia's credibility on the Iraqi and the entire Middle Eastern market. Therefore, Jiří Cupák, Miroslav Ondrák, and Karel Noga from Chepos, Technoexport's supplier of investment units, appealed in panic to the Czechoslovak Vice-President. In their letter of 20 October 1989, the Chepos representatives summarised the twenty years of cooperation between Iraq and Czechoslovakia:

> Czechoslovakia's share in the construction of [Iraq's] refining capacities is 50–60% and has contributed substantially to the development of the Iraqi oil industry. With the exception of supplies for the lubricating oil manufacturing plant, these projects were paid in cash. (…) The leading Iraqi representatives have always evaluated this cooperation very positively, especially appreciating that Czechoslovakia did not abandon the very risky workplace in Baiji and built three large plants there during the [Iran–Iraq] war.[28]

Although, as indicated in the report, all Iraqi payment obligations to Technoexport had been fulfilled by 1988, Adamec's decision to halt a massive new commission was caused by Iraq's growing debt: Iraq's accounts payable through December 1990, i.e., the balance of money due for goods or services delivered or used but not yet paid for, totalled 520.4 million dollars.[29] During his one-and-a-half hour meeting with President and Prime Minister Saddam Hussein on 15 October 1989, Adamec managed to obtain neither money nor oil.[30] In an interview for the Czechoslovak News Agency following his return, Adamec told the reporter that "Unfortunately, Iraq does not adhere to the maturity dates. Even during the recent negotiations, it was not possible to reach agreements that would fully satisfy the Czechoslovak side".[31] In an unexpected turn of events, Adamec himself was forced to step down as the last communist prime minister of Czechoslovakia before the end of the year, on 7 December 1989, but the Iraqi debt was not settled by his successors either. After the fall of Saddam Hussein fourteen years later in 2003, Iraq's accounts revealed that some two-thirds of the country's 130 billion dollar foreign debt was owed to non-Paris Club states, including former Comecon members such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria.[32]

↗ Tytus Szabelski-Różniak, *Flow Control II* (2), from the series *Divide and Connect*, 2024. Photograph of Druzhba (Friendship) oil pipeline presented at the *Critical Infrastructures* exhibition, VI PER gallery, Prague

25 N. Raydan, *If The Daura Refinery Could Speak (Part I)*, The Chokepoint, 15.08.2022, https://chokepoint.substack.com/p/if-the-daura-refinery-could-speak (accessed: 12.03.2024).

26 P. Zídek, K. Sieber, *Československo…*, op. cit., p. 110.

27 Ibid., p. 110.

28 Denní situační zpráva č. 238/89, 30.10. 1989, Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/projekt_89/situacni-zpravy/dsz238-1989.pdf (accessed: 6.01.2024). Translated by the author.

29 P. Zídek, K. Sieber, *Československo…*, op. cit., p. 110.

30 P. Zídek, *Když Arabové přestali platit*, Lidové noviny, 14.10.2009, https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/kdyz-arabove-prestali-platit.A091014_000055_ln_noviny_sko (accessed: 7.01.2024).

31 S. Drahný, *Saddám: přítel ČSSR, který neplatil*, Dnes.cz, 30.12.2006, https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/zahranicni/saddam-pritel-cssr-ktery-neplatil.A061230_102616_zahranicni_nel (accessed: 7.01.2024). Translated by the author.

32 E. Burton, J. Mark, S. Marung, *Development*, [in:] *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonisation*, eds. J. Mark, P. Betts, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, p. 109.

33 *Czech Expertise in Iraq and the Middle East*, "Czech Trade Focus", June 2003, https://mzv.gov.cz/file/166817/focus2003_3.pdf (accessed: 6.01.2024).

34 *Enhancing Gasoline Production*, Unis, https://www.unis.cz/cs/reference/bare; *ČTK, Brněnský Unis zřejmě přijde o miliardovou zakázku v Rusku*, deník.cz, https://www.denik.cz/ekonomika/brnensky-unis-zrejme-prijde-o-miliardovou-zakazku-v-rusku-20140814.html (accessed: 10.03.2024).

35 *Upgrading Basrah Refinery*, Unis, https://www.unis.cz/en/references/irsc (accessed: 10.03.2024).

36 J. Korselt, *Prokop Engineering má v Iráku zakázku za 40 mil USD*, finance.cz, 14 November 2006, https://www.finance.cz/zpravy/finance/85486-prokop-engineering-ma-v-iraku-zakazku-za-40-mil-usd/; *České firmy úspěšně realizovaly výstavbu rafinanční jednotky v Iráku*, Ministerstvo průmyslu a obchodu, 30.01.2009, https://www.mpo.cz/cz/zahranicni-obchod/mezinarodni-obchod-dle-teritorii/afrika-a-blizky-vychod/ceske-firmy-uspesne-realizovaly-vystavbu-rafinancni-jednotky-v-iraku-55365/ (accessed: 10.03.2024); M. Petříček, *Irák: země, kde kulovnici říkají* „brno", „Hospodářské noviny", 9.11.2009, https://archiv.hn.cz/c1-38998880-irak-kde-kulovnici-rikaji-brno (accessed: 6.01.2024).

EPILOGUE

The fall of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist government following the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 brought new business opportunities for the Czech Republic as the successor state to Czechoslovakia. The June 2003 issue of Czech Trade Focus, a business-oriented newsletter of the Economic and Commercial Office of the Czech Embassy in Washington, D.C., promoted Czech companies for their experience in large-scale investments in Iraq. The short article detailed that:

> Czech companies have an extensive expertise in many large infrastructure projects in Iraq completed in the period 1960–1990. (...) Czech companies are a logical source of knowledge, including drawings and engineering parts, for keeping up the Iraqi oil industry, for upgrading the Iraqi infrastructure and for modernizing the Iraqi industrial base. (...) In combination with the expertise from the past, the Czech companies are an ideal choice for strategic alliances and industrial partnerships in the reconstruction process in Iraq.[33]

Instead of a "reconstruction process", however, the invasion of Iraq launched the protracted Iraq War, which lasted until 2011, followed by a series of conflicts, including the insurgency of the so-called Islamic State (2017–present).

Nevertheless, as early as 2005, the Czech company Unis became the main designer and contractor for the 50 million euro modernisation of the oil refinery in Basra, which was intended to increase petrol production. The project was completed in 2015,[34] and work is currently underway to modernise the Basra refinery, which is expected to be concluded in 2026.[35] In November 2006, Technoexport and the Czech engineering company Prokop Engineering Brno were granted a 40 million dollar contract for atmospheric distillation technology at the Daura oil refinery, completing the project in 2009.[36] In September 2015, Technoexport – by then controversially privatised by Tomáš Plachý – signed a contract worth 125 million dollars for the expansion of the Basra refinery. This time, the importance of Basra lay in its secure location in Iraqi-controlled territory. Three years earlier, in June 2014, Technoexport was working on a 250 million dollar expansion of the largest Iraqi oil refinery in Baiji (which the company had built in the 1980s), when heavy fighting with the Islamic State reached the site. Technoexport barely managed to evacuate its employees to Baghdad and back to Europe.

As journalists Milan Mikulka and Petr Lukáč claimed, "thanks to contacts from the days of socialist Czechoslovakia, Czech companies have succeeded in obtaining contracts for the modernisation of refineries in Iraq. [...] For example [Tomáš] Plachý or [Jiří] Kovář, who today own the design companies [Technoexport and Unis respectively], were directly on the construction sites in Iraq at the beginning of their careers".[37]

Despite the political and economic changes in Czechoslovakia and Iraq in 1989 and 2003, respectively, formerly state-owned and now privatised Czech companies continue to profit from the Iraqi oil industry, which at the same time remains a project of "unfinished modernisation" as Iraq – despite its immense oil wealth – is still dependent on the import of oil products such as reformulated petrol due to a lack of its own refining capacity.[38]

37 M. Mikulka, P. Lukáč, *Češi získali v Iráku zakázku za tři miliardy. Rozšíří rafinerii na jihu země, kde neoperuje Islámský stát*, Hospodářské noviny, 23.09. 2015, https://archiv.hn.cz/c1-64639850-cesi-ziskali-v-iraku-zakazku-za-tri-miliardy-rozsiri-rafinerii-na-jhu-zeme-kde-neoperuje-islamsky-stat (accessed: 10.03. 2024). Translated by the author.

38 *Iraq aims to cut oil imports by 2024 with boost in domestic refineries*, Al Mayadeen English, 6.01.2024, https://english.almayadeen.net/news/politics/iraq-aims-to-cut-oil-imports-by-2024-with-boost-in-domestic (accessed: 24.03.2024).

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURES

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ARTISTS: NOMEDA & GEDIMINAS URBONAS,
TYTUS SZABELSKI-RÓŻNIAK, JIŘÍ ŽÁK & RADO IŠTOK

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PARTNERS
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AUTOPORTRET

KATERYNA FILONOVA

From 2000 to 2018, journalist and editor of media outlets based in Kramatorsk and Donetsk oblast. From 2018 to 2021, director of the Donetsk Regional Museum. Researcher for the *Networks of support* project at the Centre for Urban History in Lviv.

MILENA TRZCIŃSKA

Graduate of the Faculty of Architecture of Warsaw University of Technology and Institute of Polish Culture of the University of Warsaw; co-creator of the "RZUT" architecture quarterly and Studio Widoki; PhD candidate at the University of Warsaw Doctoral School. She is an architect, architectural educator and researcher examining architecture in the urban context and the relationship between architecture and social sciences.

ŁUKASZ STĘPNIK

Graduate of the Faculty of Architecture of Warsaw University of Technology, where he works as a researcher and educator at the Department of Architecture of Living Environment. Co-creator of the "RZUT" architecture quarterly and Studio Widoki. Interested in housing and standardised architecture.

MATEUSZ WŁODAREK

Doctor of social sciences, cultural studies scholar, architecture researcher, curator. He examines architecture from the perspective of new materialism. He works on exhibitions in the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning. Co-curator of the NARRACJE festival in Gdańsk (2024).

ZUZANNA MIELCZAREK

Architect, architecture researcher, curator of architectural exhibitions, expert in affordable housing. She works at the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning and teaches at the Inclusive Housing Studio at Brno University of Technology's Faculty of Architecture. PhD candidate at the Faculty of Architecture at Warsaw University of Technology. Co-curator of the NARRACJE festival in Gdańsk (2024).

OLIVER BANATVALA

PhD candidate at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) at University College London. In his research he analyses the transformation of shopping centres after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in order to understand how war transforms cities.

JANA PAVLOVÁ

Graduate of art history at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, and of art theory at UMPRUM in Prague. In her research she focuses on postmodern architecture, especially in the Czech context and with reference to the 1990s. Curator of contemporary art and architecture. From 2018 to 2019, member of the curatorial team of the VI PER Gallery in Prague.

BORYS FILONENKO

Curator, art critic, and editor-in-chief of ist publishing (Kharkiv–Kyïv–Khmelnytskyi). He was a co-curator of the Pavilion of Ukraine at the 59th La Biennale di Venezia (2022), of the 18th Biennale Architettura in Venice (2023), and of the Second National Biennale of Young Art in Kharkiv (2019). From 2015 to 2018, he was a curator of Come in art gallery and Aza Nizi Maza gallery in Kharkiv. Lives and works in Kyïv, Lviv and Kharkiv.

VALENTYNA SHEVCHENKO

Doctor of history, senior researcher at the Institute of Ukrainian History at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. She is a researcher for the "24.02.22, 5 ranku, Svidchennia s vijny" project, and a database administrator at the Centre for Urban History in Lviv.

POLINA DAVYDENKO

Photographer and artist from Brno, with Ukrainian roots. She has photographed coal mining in Dobropillia – the city where she was born – as well as the climate grief and miserable living conditions of migrants there. She returned there in the summer of 2023, equipped with a bulletproof vest, a helmet, and accreditation as a war reporter, creating a photography series at the intersection of artistic photography and photojournalism.

ŠÁRKA SVOBODOVÁ

Art historian, curator, founding member of 4AM Fórum pro architekturu a media. She is a lecturer at Masaryk University in Brno and the Faculty of Architecture and Faculty of Art at Brno University of Technology. Together with sociologist Gaby Khazalova, she coordinates the CITY project, a forum for a more bearable everyday life.

ARTUR WABIK

Visual artist, curator, publicist, pop culture researcher. Since 1996, he has been associated with the graffiti movement and street art. Author of murals and installations in public space. Co-founder of Muzeum Komiksu (Comic Book Museum) in Kraków.

LEVENTE POLYÁK

Urbanist, researcher, architecture critic, and freelance artist. He studied architecture, urban planning, art theory and sociology in Budapest and Paris. Founder of KÉK – The Hungarian Centre for Contemporary Architecture. Since 2015, he has been working on the Interactive Cities (dedicated to social media and new ways of city governance) and Funding the Cooperative City (dedicated to new economic models for community spaces) projects.

HANNA SKĄPSKA

Architect and stage designer. Recipient of the student Award of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage (2014/2015). She lives and works in Paris, where she is preparing a doctoral thesis on the protection and renovation of contemporary architectural heritage at Université Paris Est Sup. Educator at ENSA Paris-Belleville. Author of the book *Iwona Buczkowska. L'architecte face à la pérennité de son oeuvre* (2020).

IGNACIO FRADEJAS-GARCÍA

Professor at the Faculty of Sociology of University of Oviedo. He received the title of Doctor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Autonomous University in Barcelona. Experienced in field work in Gambia, Chile, Morocco, Haiti, Congo, Turkey, Romania, and Spain. He researches informality, (im)mobility, transnational migration, humanitarianism, networks, and sport.

KINGA ZEMŁA

Architect. Graduated from the Faculty of Architecture at the Royal University of Technology in Stockholm with a thesis on affordable housing (2020). She writes for "Builder", "Architektura i Biznes", "Zawód: Architekt" and "Przekrój". Permanent contributor to the "Autoportret" quarterly. Passionate about literature, travel, and Latin America.

RADO IŠTOK

Writer, editor, and curator of the collection of art after 1945 at the National Gallery in Prague; PhD candidate at the Institute of Art History of Charles University in Prague. He writes for "Artforum", "Flash Art", and "Art & Antiques".

DAMIAN NOWAK

Graphic designer, author of posters, signs and publications. He cooperates with institutions and designers on arranging exhibitions and developing visual identity for cultural events. Associated with Krakow's Parastudio*. Co-founder of the New Roman gallery collective (2011–2014). www.behance.net/parastudio

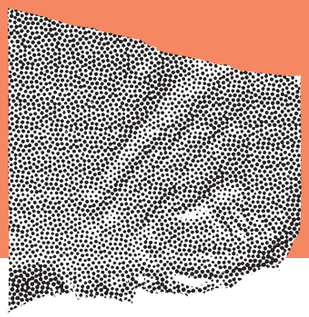
Valera hesitates, stops. Pasha runs into him again.

"You're fuckin' . . . uh . . . dead meat!"

Valera isn't listening, though. All you can hear in the fog are his high boots stomping through the cold puddle water.

They walk in silence. The fog has blanketed everything on the orphanage grounds—feels like you're walking through a wall, leaving behind the world of the living and groping ahead until you run into something horrible. Pasha's walking along, just listening to the jugs softly knocking against each other, and he suddenly realizes that he hasn't felt this good in a while. Well, no, not exactly good. What's so good about trudging through some place where, in all likelihood, they've been burying corpses for the past several months, where, in all likelihood, they'll keep doing so for the next several months? Anyway, you're walking through the fog, carrying water, and at least there's something to keep you busy, at least something in all this has meaning. You don't have any doubts while you're walking—you know you have to carry the water back. And then you'll have to make the walk again, with empty jugs, to fetch more water.

SERHIY ZHADAN *THE ORPHANAGE*



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