

Tamara Spalajković

Once Upon a Time in Planýrka

26. 4. – 9. 6. 2024



Thu–Sun 2 pm–7 pm Curated by Nela Klajbanová

Planýrka is an extensive hillside that belongs to Ponava district of Brno. It's situated north of the city centre, where the Královo Pole Shopping can be found. Planýrka is an area with unregulated lush greenery, wetland and has rich biodiversity. In 2023, as a part of a biological research, it was found out that some 360 species of flora and fauna inhabit the area, 39 of those falling under the 'endangered' category. Some are protected by law, while a few of them are critically endangered, like the Northern lapwing, which is one of the fastest declining bird species in our country. Planýrka is a unique ecosystem, where hundreds of species co-exist together in the background of the hustle of the city and therefore it's necessary to come up with strategies for more than just human cohabitation.

The urban wilderness of Planýrka is long term affected by urbanization, market plans and complex ownership relations. The area has a specific geomorphological character – any surrounding demolitions or developments could put too much pressure and activate the present landslide. The underdeveloped sewage system in the surrounding Brno districts is causing deposition of sewage sludge to the local wetland. While the reports of the scientific community and activists were repeatedly asking for the area to be protected, the local authorities prioritize its commodification through development plans. Even though the city denied the 2021 urban plan proposal of the Brno City Architect's Office, the currently progressing development projects, mapped by the BRNO BRZO web portal, are suggesting that the intended buildings could potentially destroy the conditions needed for a multi-species co-existence and they could lead to a landslide. These steps confirm a clear pro-human approach that doesn't consider the unique local biodiversity, nor the unstable subsoil.

Reflection of the Planýrka ecosystem and the prerequisite for local interspecies cohabitation is something that visual artist Tamara Spalajković focuses on in her artistic doctoral research *Imagination as a Way to More Fair Spatial Politics* at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Brno. The research includes field recordings, text, image and video outputs. An illustration of the aforementioned biological assessment from 2023, co-created with Matěj Sláma, is also a part of it. The aim of this visualization is the representation of all the species residing in the area, whose living conditions are influenced by urbanization, and which are not taken into account in the decision-making processes of future urban planning. In many ways, this is also represented in the exhibition, whether it's a nominal list of all the species, or the spiral object. The spiral represents a metaphorical roundtable meeting of all the species, where the representatives of individual groups of the habitat can discuss and become a part of the decision-making processes concerning landscape management.

Once Upon a Time in Planýrka exhibition follows up on the research as well as it is a narrative of multi-species cohabitation on the hills of Brno. The social-urban development is complemented by speculative narratives mapping the anthropogenic influence and gradual changes in the landscape. Among other things, the author questions the current practices of urban planning, which ignore site-specific multi-species cohabitation.

In *Net Worth* (2023) video, co-authored with Daniel Rejmon and Jakub Daněk, we follow the stories of several characters with diverse attitudes towards the area. Some of them work there, some are sent there for an exploration mission, others want to invest in it or spend their free time there. The video uses fictional and speculative modes of storytelling to describe commercial and political interests interfering with the shape of the area and the conditions for cohabitation and interspecies relationships. The area becomes an agent affecting the spatial planning processes with its properties. Another plane we can observe in *Net Worth* is the merging of humans with *brain computer interface* technology (called *Synapse Pro* in the video), which illustrates the deepening of technocratic growth focused on profit. The video called *Intercepting Urbanization* (2024) was created several months later and loosely follows not only *Net Worth*, but the whole story of Planýrka as well. In both videos we follow a pair of pigeons which guide us around the area and present us with the problems associated with life on Planýrka and its future. *Net Worth* ends with the two pigeon companions singing. They sigh over the current gentrification and development projects leading to unaffordable living not only for humans, but for the animal and plant species as well, due to buildings on natural sites. In the beginning of *Interception Urbanization* one pigeon thanks the other for joining him in a song. Their storytelling blends with utopian ideas of what Planýrka could look like if only the ecosystem was maintained with consideration of the resident species.

Without doubt, the space as an ecological niche suffered from anthropocentric development projects, but different stories can be told as well – a rich history of resilience and adaptability of the land, and of each animal and plant species against environmental changes. Therefore, Planýrka becomes a case study of much wider problematics – urban planning policies, urbanization and ecosystem restoration.

Nela Klajbanová

How did you learn about the issues of Planýrka? Why did you become interested in Planýrka at all?

Since I've been living in Brno, I've been visiting Planýrka for various reasons, as it is one of the few larger green areas close to the city center. Especially during lockdown, we used to go shopping to a deserted Tesco, dumpster diving, make a campfire or go enjoy the view. On our walks around Planýrka with Daniel Rajmon (co-author of *Net Worth* video), we'd been thinking about the strange nature of this place, and we would explore its less accessible parts.

We were fascinated by the almost inappropriate placement of buildings, unregulated greenery, abandoned stadium and the local wetland. The location was an example of a deregulated urban area. We had a suspicion that the place was a central point in a case that was unknown to us, so we began to search for information.

Daniel stumbled upon a text by Šárka Svobodová and Jaroslav Sedlák, *Brno sports dream*, in which they describe, in great detail, the urbanization of the area – e.g. the problematic development of a stadium behind Lužánky, which today stands abandoned, or Bobby center. This text confirmed that the issue surrounding Planýrka is much more complex than we originally thought, and it was through its layered history and partial insubordination to urbanization. We'd decided to make a movie about Planýrka, together with Jakub Daněk, and that's how the video *Net Worth* came to be.

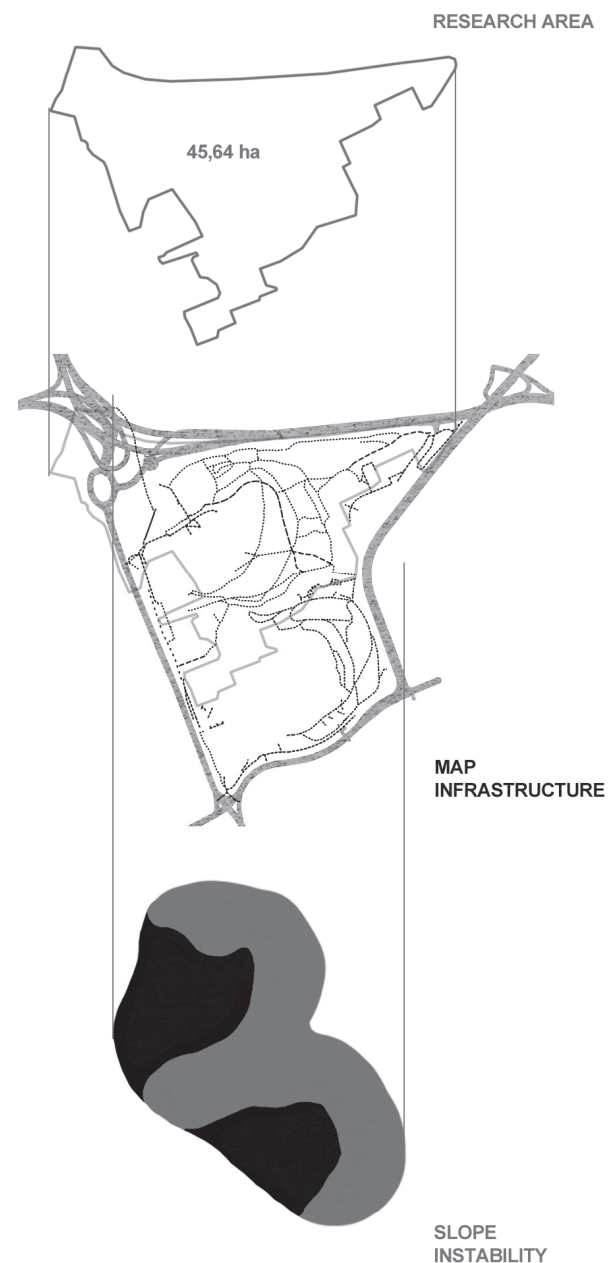
During the making of the video, I became interested in the local ecosystem as a whole and I decided to continue in further and deeper study of Planýrka.

As a part of your research, have you looked into possible solutions to help the area? What would they be?

It was essential to the research to realize that the development of the area is influenced by more factors, including non-human ones. There is an unstable hill in the area that plays a role in development plans. At the same time, the whole hill is private property and it's split between several owners. Thus, there is a conflict of interests. The current situation is that there should be a retention tank built at Rákosina u Červeného mlýna, where the wetland is located. According to interviews which I did with geologist Oldřich Krejčí, the current stabilization of the hill isn't a sufficient protection, and it would be better to leave it as urban greenery. Ornithologist Jan Sychra claims that the reeds themselves, which are in Planýrka, make a rare ecosystem for nesting and the life of birds. Ideally, the needs of present species, as well as non-human entities, like the hill, should be considered in planning processes. That would mean finding a new suitable location for the placement of the retention tank and ideally some sort of protection for the hill or the whole area.

Did you talk about the problems at Planýrka with the representatives of Brno? Are there any discussions at the city hall about potential future steps concerning management of the site?

Unfortunately, I didn't have the capacity to initiate communication with city administration as a part of my research. Since multiple parties have responsibility over



the area (private individuals, the city, Brno Water Works and Sewage), it's necessary to approach the conversation in a complex way and to prepare concrete arguments for all of the parties involved. The results of my research and ideally the videos themselves could maybe serve as a basis for such process. Throughout this year we plan to continue the research together with Kateřina Singer who's a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Architecture in Brno. We plan to create alternative spatial proposals that will take into account the multi-species needs of the site. I also plan to participate in argumentation and the strategy of communication with BWWS (Brno Water Works and Sewage) and the municipal offices. I think that currently, it's important to popularize the situation at Planýrka and to open a public discussion. I've been preparing walks and talks with experts. Next year in May we will be organizing a symposium together with Agronauts* collective, where we'd like to examine the site through performative procedures.

And what are the future plans for Planýrka? Do you believe that some of the processes can still be affected?

Brno city has been continuously trying to use the site for construction purposes. At BRNO BRZO portal you can look up projects currently planned at Planýrka – among them an open-

air sport venue in place of a former hockey arena, Aquapark behind Lužánky (planned since the 90's), or Mendel Quarter scientific workplace. Demolition of Za Lužánky stadium is also planned. At this moment, there is still space for joining the discussion concerning finding an alternative site for the retention tank construction and a chance to start taking care of the reed ecosystem. The question is how will the slope react to more buildings and demolitions. For that it is necessary to use civil strategies, to prepare arguments for meetings with BWWS, and eventually to implement more campaigns. I would love to connect with other people who would be interested and who have the expertise to join the process.

This interview with Tamara Spalajković was conducted by Nela Klajbanová in April 2024.

Tamara Spalajković (1996, Belgrade) is an artist, researcher and musician. She completed her studies in the Video studio at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Brno where she is currently a PhD candidate. As part of her artistic research, she creates docu-fictional videos which deal with the effects of urbanization on multispecies coexistence. Tamara Spalajković is part of the FaVU music label, in the past she was a member of the editorial team of Bublina Magazine. Together with Daniel Rajmon, she has the band Keiko Sei. She independently creates experimental electronic music as hiding season.

Net Worth, 2023, 44:00 min.

Intercepting Urbanization, 2024, 09:32 min.

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IT'S ME, A HUMAN IN A PIGEON SUIT

The white houses you can't buy without a loan
with the swamp right next to them
are worth a Golden dome.
Ponávka disappeared,
the City got in,
it makes your head spin
they call it win-win
but you don't see what they mean

this ain't a solution
everyone gets that
oh yeah, they've built us the City
where we can't afford to live
airbnb
on an empty street

It's me, a human in a pigeon suit
I'm standing here, the only bird you'll see around
It's me, a human in a pigeon suit

I can pretend this is a public place
I turned off the sound, plane mode leaves no trace,
What matters is we can go shopping any time
We'll end up broke, who cares, we will be fine

It's me dressed as a pigeon
It's us over the dawn of days to come

A pigeon with a human inside

The end

The videos were created at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Technology in Brno as part of the project *Imagination as a Tool For Fairer Spatial Policies*, supported by the funds of special-purpose support for specific university research provided by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports in 2023. The exhibition is supported by the funds from the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the City of Prague.

The video *Net Worth* was co-authored with Jakub Daňek and Daniel Rajmon.

3D animation for the video *Intercepting Urbanization*: Sofie Gjuričová
Graphical data processing: Matěj Sláma
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Technical support: Max Máslo
Photodocumentation: Jan Kolský
Translation: Markéta Effenbergerová
Thanks to: Sára Márc, Kateř Tureček, Galerie Fotograf, Pavel Dvořák, Students from Video Studio at FFA BUT, Andrew Wilson, Veronika Vlková

etc.

