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QUARTERLY ON GOOD SPACE

2—2023

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SELF-ORGANISATION

To begin with, let me admit my mistake. I once said publicly that regeneration would not begin until destruction ended. I was wrong. This was made clear to me by a radio broadcast in which Paweł Pieniążek talked about his book *Resistance. Ukrainians against the Russian invasion*. He spoke about the situation during the shelling of a district in Donetsk in 2015: air raids lasted most of the day; residents were only able to go about their business between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.

"You can imagine all the things that need doing when you only have eight hours to spend outside of the basement. And what they did was clear their backyards of rubble and broken trees, repair shop windows [...], try to maintain the reality they used to have. They fought for that reality. This became the factor that caught my attention for years to come. Namely, how people try to fight for their former everydayness."

The image of people fixing up their surroundings despite the inevitable destruction stuck in my imagination. The ineffective hustle and bustle. The future is uncertain, the present is dangerous, but the inhabitants are rallying and self-organizing. It is not about the result: what counts is the act of refusing to submit to the order of war. Regaining agency.

Two main threads intertwine in this issue about self-organization. First, in the context of the war in Ukraine, we look at our neighbours' ability to create a horizontal network state. We refer to the formative experience of Ukrainian society – the Maidan Revolution of 2014. We analyse examples of bottom-up architectural and artistic responses to the refugee situation during a full-blown war and the tremendous force with which civic movements began to create more or less rudimentary shelters. Architecture is changing: from spatial form to human activity, to the ability to think about the future despite the surrounding brutality of war. In an interview with Natalia Raczkowska, Joanna Kusiak evokes the past reconstruction of Warsaw and the future of Homs in Syria in order to explain the radical hope that drives action even in the face of urbicide.

The second thread concerns bottom-up spontaneous architecture, or *anarchitecture*. This is something that overturns hierarchies, ignores established orders, and values collective effort. It is often excluded from official textbooks and discourses – it tends to be overlooked. It confers human agency, empathy, and the ability to cooperate. It is a constant movement; it is change for which it is increasingly hard to find room within the space appropriated by money and ground rent.

The examples of a different logic that are collected in this issue bring hope. They prove that we can overcome apathy and despair – together.

(I don't know which is more difficult).

Dorota Leśniak-Rychlak

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The English edition of Self-organisation issue was supportret by National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning

NIAiU NARODOWY INSTYTUT ARCHITEKTURY I URBANISTYKI

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ISSN 1730–3613
Free electronic publication, special issue QUARTERLY

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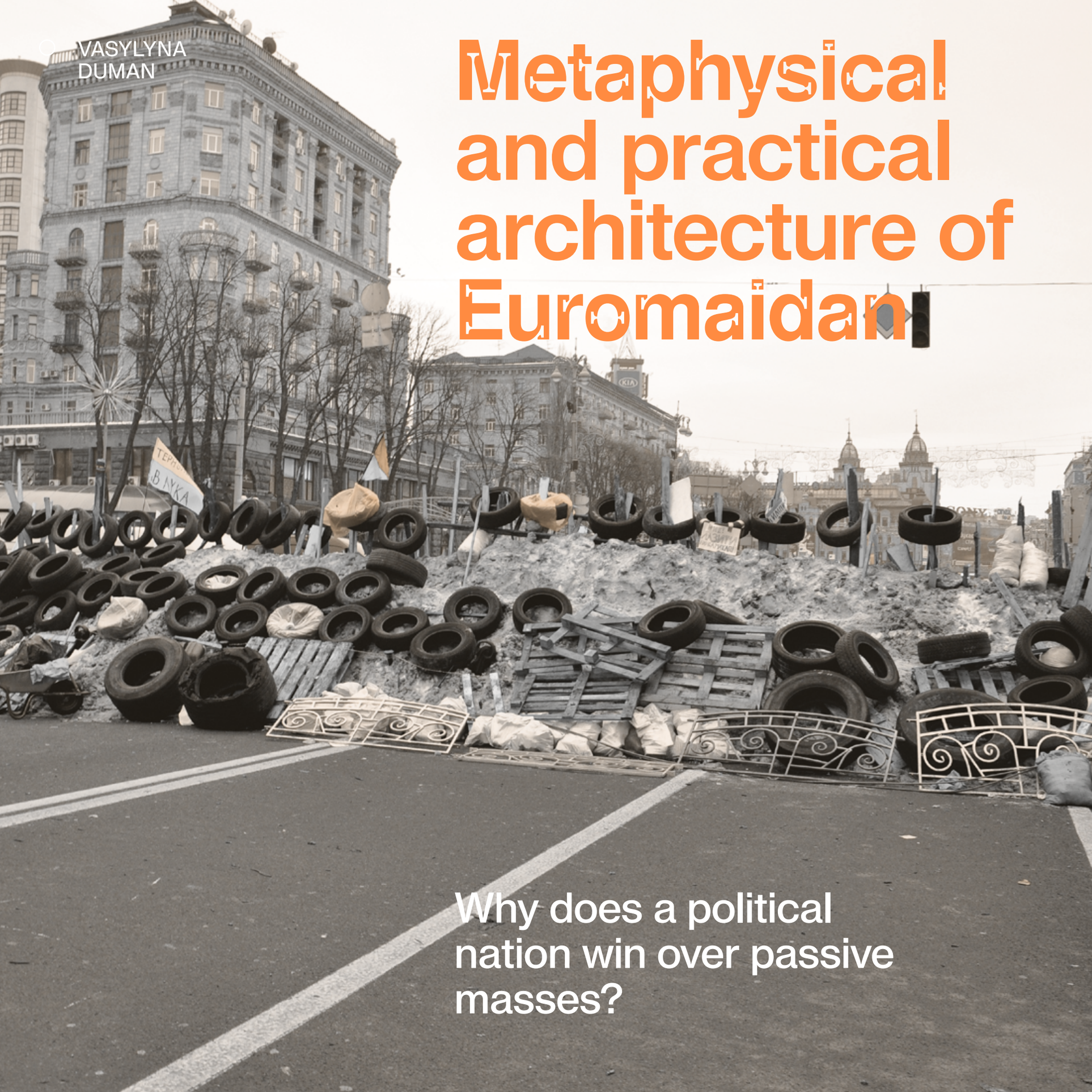
Metaphysical and practical architecture of Euromaidan



Why does a political nation win over passive masses?

The Euromaidan in Kyiv, December 2013
—
photo: DixonD, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0

I am writing this text in Kyiv. In the first days of May, alarms sound more and more often, and our anti-aircraft defence regularly shoots down the occupiers' missiles and drones over the capital city. It is hard to get down to work because the war has stolen my inspiration. Nonetheless, I will tell you simply and honestly my personal story of participating in Euromaidan.
I will definitely regain inspiration; it will come back after the fall of the Russian neo-empire and the ultimate victory of Ukraine. For now, I wish to invite you, Dear Readers, on a retrospective journey to the Ukrainian revolutionary past.

LVIV

On November 21, 2013, I was sitting at home, reading the news with mounting weariness and disgust. Prime Minister Azarov had announced that Ukraine would be giving up the European vector. This information irritated me, and at the same time it left me feeling helpless. We had tried so many times to make our fellow citizens aware of the need to stop the arbitrariness of the Yanukovych regime. Every protest died out and went to the dogs sooner or later. Yanukovych continued to do as he pleased.

This time, the appeals for people to take to the streets were heard in various cities, not just in Kyiv. In Lviv, students of the Ukrainian Catholic University started their night protest duty; I was studying towards my Master's degree there.

I didn't go anywhere that evening.

I was twenty-seven years old. As an eighteen-year-old, I witnessed the Orange Revolution and the fight against Kuchma's volte-face. Then, nine years of conditional "reaction" to the political changes – old friends telling me how enthralled they had been... and how disappointed they were then. And that protest made no sense. That irritated me. They were adults, but they were behaving so childishly. Well, this is what our nation is like; it is what it is, as our first president Leonid Kravchuk would say.

Firmly convinced that the protests would soon die down, I decided to go to the rally that had been scheduled for the following day. I firmly believed that thirty of my friends from the times of the Orange Revolution would come to the demonstration under the seat of the regional government administration (the body representing presidential power in the regions of Ukraine).

The following day, Lviv was hit by a wave of thousands of students protesting.

"They'll make a bit of a racket for a while, and then they'll go to back to their classes," I said disgruntledly as I was walking home from the demonstration.

"They can't afford a marathon. They'll be gone after a week," I continued to grumble, while getting ready for night duty at the Maidan in Lviv.

Then we waited all night for the protest to be forcibly dispersed and for the tent that had been set up at noon to be liquidated because Radio Svoboda had reported that "the Lviv Regional Administrative Court had considered the lawsuit of the Lviv Regional State Administration and ordered that the tent in the square in front of the Shevchenko monument be dismantled on the night of November 22–23." It all ended in a funny way: court enforcers came to the students in the morning, but it turned out that the tent had been set up at a different address than the one given in the court order.

That is how I got involved in our next revolution, with the firm belief that it was the cause of nineteen-year-olds. I was with them because I believed that it would all end badly, so I needed to share a future with my younger colleagues – a future that they were not ready for.
I expected persecutions, arrests, and trials of the demonstrators to start within a few days, maybe a few weeks.

For a week I had been on duty at the Lviv Euromaidan in the media centre. The youth organized themselves swiftly. My generation joined them and became involved in the process, but this "rogue ship" was steered by much younger boys and girls.

How did they know how to do it? They knew because they had seen it with their own eyes. They had observed the Orange Revolution (although they did not participate in it due to their young age), the Language Maidan (protests in 2012–2013 against attempts to introduce Russian as an official language at the regional level), and rallies in support of the protests in Vradiivka[1] against militia brutality. They organised on social media, met in the square, established an organizing committee, and – with the participation of the latter – planned further actions, agreed on positions, and solved current issues.

Within a short time, regional Maidans scattered throughout Ukraine focused on organizing mass transport for those willing to go to Kyiv Maidan Nezalezhnosti. A mass presence in the capital city was absolutely essential. Due to lack of time and the enormous amount of work involved, regional protest centres had to operate 24 hours a day. Someone offered transport, someone provided drivers, someone arranged fuel, someone else preferred to go as an activist. Local revolution units helped all these people meet and ensured their safety (if the police tried to block the buses, lawyers from the city's Maidan came to the rescue, released the detainees, and helped the buses pass the blockade).

Information was constantly updated, and fake news was fact-checked – a separate group dealt with this.
If there was a post somewhere about the detention of activists, or Titushky,[2] or a potential attack by the militia, or "anti-Maidan activists hanged in the Brukhovytskyi forest", and so on, volunteers were easily found via social networking sites, and they went to the given place in person to verify the information.

1 On June 27, 2013, two policemen and a taxi driver from the village of Vradiivka in the Mykolaiv region raped a young woman and then tried to kill her. The villagers responded to the situation with rallies, blocking the road, and storming the police station. The protests lasted from June 30 to July 3. A Berkut unit was brought to the village, and the militia deployed tear gas. (All footnotes come from the translator from Ukrainian to Polish, Maria Szewczuk).

2 Titushky – young people hired by the authorities to intimidate and brutally disrupt the protests in 2013–2014. The name appeared before Euromaidan, and it comes from the name of Vadym Titushko, who attacked two journalists during the Europe Day celebrations in the spring of 2013 in Bila Tserkva, before the very eyes of the militia.

Of course, there were differences of opinions; there were discussions and confrontations. Would it not be blasphemous to plant European Union flags on the monuments of Shevchenko and Franko? (Not really, but as this proposal did not come to the students from the organizing committee, for some reason it wasn't implemented). Which idea shall we put into action, and which shall we give up? Do we allow politicians to speak? Do we call students of Lviv universities to the rallies? Who is going to bring the loudspeakers, who shall lead the column, and who shall write and distribute posters if people don't have time to make their own? The Lviv Euromaidan arrived at compromise solutions, and at the end of the Revolution of Dignity a blockade of military units was organised, just like in other regions, so that Ukrainian soldiers would not be thrown into the fight against the Euromaidan.

It may not be obvious from this long introduction, but the Lviv Euromaidan really worked smoothly and harmoniously from day one. Soon, on November 27, a week after it had started, I set off for Kyiv.

KYIV

I came to the capital with Vidsichi.[3] We went to the rally straight away.

At this point, it is worth mentioning the Orange Revolution. Then, the main revolutionary work was organized by the Pora! social initiative, which consisted of two parts. The volunteer section used black symbols, while the wing pursuing political ambitions operated in yellow. The latter soon discredited itself, while Black Pora! scored points during the revolution and then split into two organizations: Opora (currently a network of independent election observers with an excellent reputation) and Vidsich (focusing on peaceful protest actions on the streets to protect human rights, civil liberties and constitutional freedoms).

Of course, both organizations joined the Revolution of Dignity protest movement. Opora patrolled the vicinity of hospitals to prevent the Titushky and the militia from kidnapping hospitalized Maidan participants; they also contacted foreign politicians and public activists to sensitize the world to the situation in Ukraine. Vidsich encouraged students of the capital's universities to go to protests instead of classes, organized student columns, and guarded one of the entrances to the Maidan near the Lach Gate. Thanks to them standing on duty in this location, the Vidsich members – in their zone of responsibility – were the first to stop Berkut police when they tried to storm the square. In calmer moments, they would catch provocateurs, organize the flow of people visiting the Maidan, and so forth.

I did not stay with Vidsich, which had taken on many tasks at the beginning of the Revolution of Dignity. Three groups are formed around every important social movement: supporters, opponents, and the undecided. It is the neutral majority that tips the balance in favour of the winners. The Vidsich people actively communicated with every interested person (including those who were not interested). They carried out street actions, handed out leaflets, and they talked, and they talked, and they talked.

This type of working with people on a personal level is emotionally exhausting. You may need to deal with aggressive interlocutors; sometimes you have to explain things that seem self-evident and engage in discussions about them. Despite the wall of indifference or prejudice, it is essential to keep on talking. Someone, eventually, will take a flyer and find the courage to join later. Someone else will pretend to be neutral during the action, but then they will bring medicines and food. Even if the action seems ineffective, it sows the seeds of doubt and publicizes the protests. Talking to people is really necessary, every time. In 2004, I had enough passion for this type of activism, but not so much in 2013. I simply didn't have the energy to talk that much any more. This is why I stayed on the Maidan. There, I immediately met many friends from the times of the Orange Revolution. I also made new acquaintances, which later turned into friendships.

I joined housing volunteers. After all, activists from different regions, dozens, no, hundreds of people, came to the protest. Private Kyiv residents, local churches, and hotel and hostel owners in the capital were willing to provide them with accommodation. Our task was to find a roof over the heads of all those arriving and make sure they had a good stay. So, during the day I went to street campaigns, and in the evenings I took care of housing people. Overnight, I slept in the Vidsich office.

It was no different on the night of November 29–30. Back then, it seemed to us that there weren't enough people, that the protests would die down, and that the authorities would take Ukraine away from Europe. We imagined years of stagnation and arrogance of power ahead of us. We understood the tragedy of such a solution, and we knew that we would stay there, protesting, until the end. Between 3:00 a.m. and 3:30 a.m. I was standing somewhere near the column with Berehynia. Tired, I finally went to take a nap with the Vidsich – a cubbyhole in the basement with poor mobile reception. At four in the morning, the uniformed services forcefully dispersed the protesters, and the scale of violence shocked the entire country. I found out about it from my dad – he called me; somehow, he managed to get through and asked if I had been hurt.

In the morning, Kyiv resembled a stormy sea. I tried to find my friends by phone because I had left some of them behind at the Maidan. A Berkut member beat up Katya Overchenko, a person responsible for accommodation; he hit her with a baton, but she escaped. The

Protest outside district authority building in Lviv, 22 November 2013. Vasylyna Duman holding a banner with the slogan: "They choose money, I choose values"
—
photo: Author's records

3 Vidsich (Relief) – a civic movement in Ukraine, created in reaction to the regime of Viktor Yanukovych coming to power.

youth hid in the Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel; so, come the morning, crowds were flocking in that direction. Thousands of Kyiv residents and visitors rushed to help. This is how the Euromaidan Public Sector was born.

Euromaidan Public Sector. Architecture and structure of the Maidan in the time and space of the Revolution of Dignity

The air in Mikhailovsky (Archangel Michael's) Monastery seemed charged, almost to the point of electric shock. People came from all directions – the crowd grew. Everyone wanted to do something, to demonstrate their outrage at the beating of students by Berkut special police. It went without saying: we needed to get organized.

Colleagues from the Public Sector (we came up with that name a few days later, but we were already functioning by then) set up tents in the courtyard in front of the cathedral.

We took down personal contact data from everyone who came and wished to join the protest, in order to later inform specific people about further actions. The risk of small groups exposing themselves to danger had to be minimized. Since there were plenty of volunteers, we began to divide them into hundreds and appoint the most active ones, those with natural leadership skills, to the positions of centurions and decurions. Then those persons chose meeting places and informed other group members about the actions. ○

a well-defined coordination division. Someone else – as we did – followed the principle of natural leadership. Euromaidan was a nation in miniature.

In addition to organizing the protesters, we had to cope with many other important tasks. For instance, legal protection needed to be provided to the beaten-up students, against whom false criminal cases were initiated. It was necessary to find out which hospitals these people were sent to, and what help they needed. More than one demonstrator was missing, and their families were looking for them. A separate tent dealt with all these matters, and after the rally on December 1, 2013, that group continued their activities for the Euromaidan. They were responsible for the legal battles.

Material and technical support was another matter. People offered help, and we had to use it as effectively as possible and report it efficiently because Euromaidan was based to a large extent on trust. A separate tent helped self-organize all people who wanted to support Euromaidan materially in some way, for example by bringing firewood, making stoves, buying medicine for the injured, and so forth.

In another tent, socks, gloves, hats, warm clothes and shoes were distributed. Many victims of beatings during Euromaidan lost their belongings during the attack. Lots of people needed a change of clothes.

Accommodation. Accommodation was available in many apartments, offices and hostels, and the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the National Exhibition Centre (one of the five largest in the world) also opened their doors to the Maidan protesters. There was enough space for large groups of people, but they had to be provided with bedding, food, medicine (colds were common during Euromaidan), toilets and cleaning and laundry facilities, clothing, and security. The Euromaidan Public Sector provided accommodation; people settled in and participated in protest activities together. The involvement of large institutions in the revolution – the Expo Centre and the Patriarchal Cathedral – really helped. It is easier to

Vasylyna Duman in Euromaidan's media tent in Lviv. Ivan Vakarchuk, then the Rector of the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, came to support the students
—
photo: Maria Tytarenko

○ / ○ / **In this tent, I went to work. During the times of the Orange Revolution and participation in Black Pora!, I learned a valuable rule: engage in necessary work without taking on organizational functions. All Black Pora! activists knew how to do this. You show up, and you do whatever is needed without waiting for anyone, without fighting for the leadership role. The one who organizes others better, generates necessary ideas, or plans implementation – this person emerges spontaneously and naturally becomes a leader.**

There is no need to prove or explain anything to anyone – a person gains legitimacy in the group through his or her own actions and decisions. This is how the horizontal structure works; it was on this principle that Black Pora! was based, and then we organized ourselves in the same way during Euromaidan.

At that stage, the Revolution of Dignity was carried out by many groups that had influence and their own forms of self-organization. Someone was creating

Euromaidan Public Sector leaflet appealing to the members of uniformed forces: "Give up your stupid grenades, leave your shield at the scrapyard, give in to love!"
—
drawing by Tetiana Duman
photo: Author's records

Vasylyna Duman and Olha Salo in the group of protesters who defended members of the uniformed forces against provocateurs in Bankova street on 1 December
—
photo: Author's records

organize people to block a government district or to go on a street march if all participants live together. During the Revolution of Dignity, the Euromaidan Public Sector provided accommodation for over ten thousand people.

Heating points. We had addresses in Kyiv – after November 30 – where open doors were waiting for Euromaidan participants if they wished to enter and warm up.

On December 1, a huge demonstration took to the streets of Kyiv – according to various estimates, between five hundred thousand and a million people. A wave of people simply washed away the fences installed by the authorities in Maidan Nezalezhnosti, the central square of the capital. The uniformed services' officers fled when they saw how many people had gathered. Tents were quickly pitched on the Maidan, and activists moved from the courtyard of Mikhailovsky Monastery to wooden booths. If it weren't for the revolution, New Year's Eve trinkets would have been sold here to feign Christmas prosperity.

Activists also located themselves in Kyiv City Hall and the Trade Union Building.

In this way, Euromaidan physically won symbolic space for itself. Various groups of influence, public and political organizations, movements and associations divided the central square into their zones of responsibility. A stage was installed for announcing news and information about the protests, and this was where the leaders of the Revolution of Dignity and people who wanted to show their support spoke. Maidan's self-defence was formed – an alternative to law enforcement officers. Its participants voluntarily monitored security and order in the area controlled by the protesters. All groups of influence were coordinated by the National Resistance Headquarters – a non-partisan formation bringing together representatives of all forces involved in the revolutionary resistance movement, including the Public Sector. ○

○ / ○ / **The scale of self-organization was redoubled. Everyone helped provide something: food, medical care, accommodation, all sorts of support, creative initiatives, and actions. After December 9, when security forces surrounded the capital's central square, barricades began to appear on its outskirts. As Ukrainian artist Olexa Mann aptly noted, the Maidan turned into a structured city without a single architect.**

In addition to spatial changes, there were changes in the organizational structure. Various groups of influence could already be conditionally divided into conservative and liberal, more radical or inclined towards peaceful resistance. The National Resistance Headquarters managed to find a compromise and harmonize cooperation among this cacophony of public initiatives and the political opposition.

Regional Euromaidans responded to the dispersal with a new, powerful wave of aid and support and a veritable invasion of activists from all over the country. Residents of the capital worked during the day, and after work they went to the Maidan.

Over time, the Resuscitation Reform Package was born in the Public Sector: experts from various areas of the country's life perfected the required changes in the state apparatus to be implemented after the revolution. The initiative born on the Maidan later brought a lot of benefits to the country because it presented the authorities with ready-made draft laws and reform options.

Generally speaking, the Euromaidan Public Sector – created, among others, by many members of the former Black Pora! – was the main carrier of the idea of non-violent resistance. We realized that the December 1 rally was possible precisely because of its peaceful nature. On the same day, an anonymous group of radicals organized a provocation in the government district near the Presidential Administration building (currently the President's Office). This had terrible consequences: Berkut beat and detained dozens of random protesters as the riot 'organizers', who mysteriously spoke Russian and covered their faces, fled. I still believe that they acted on behalf of the then-authorities or the Russian secret services.

My friends from the Euromaidan Public Sector and myself tried to disrupt the action of the riot organizers, and we used our bodies to shield the policemen against the paving stones flying in their direction. Later, the same policemen whom we separated from the provocateurs whispered to us to leave immediately. We followed this advice, and along the way we warned anyone heading in the opposite direction. A few minutes later the attack began, and Berkut fighters injured many protesters.

Fortunately, these events did not discredit the protest movement or scare off potential supporters. People saw that the provocateurs behaved differently than the Euromaidan participants normally behaved. The Public Sector and other initiatives managed to reveal the truth and organize help for the victims.

Black Pora! made us believe that non-violent resistance as colourful revolutions, including those that end successfully, are bloodless. We had figures to look up to: on the one hand, Mahatma Gandhi, but also the Ukrainian dissidents who resisted the Soviet regime even though they had no chance of winning. We were in a better situation, richer with the experiences of others before us. We ridiculed the authorities and were able to emphasize in various ways that we were not afraid of them. Our activists were involved in the campaign on their own initiative, on a volunteer basis; we had no

grants nor a specific source of financing, and so no sponsor imposed their rules on us. We organized ourselves into a multi-leader horizontal structure and operated according to the "copyleft" principle: we agreed that common achievements or products could not and would not be used by individuals for the purposes of furthering their own political careers. This distinguished us from Yellow Pora!, which had been perceived as a political project from the start. These values and principles were implemented in the Euromaidan Public Sector.

We organized general meetings where we shared information and ideas. If an idea received the support of at least ten people, it was implemented. Among others, art exhibitions, garbage segregation on the Maidan, and "peace duty", whose aim was to reduce the level of spontaneous aggression between protesters, gained sufficient recognition to proceed to the implementation stage.

People with similar interests gathered in specific sections, or departments. A security department, a creative department (under my leadership), a street action organization department, a media cooperation department, an accommodation department, a logistic support department, a legal services department, etc. were established. Some worked in the structures of the Public Sector; others left and managed on their own, gathered like-minded people around them, and only occasionally needed help. A scientific institution in Kyiv provided us with a room for office work, another gave us a room for meetings. Preparations for activities requiring presence on the streets took place in booths on the Maidan.

We communicated with each other and with less-active participants via Facebook. The Russian social networking site VKontakte, which was popular in Ukraine at that time, was used to conduct an agitation campaign and disseminate public information.

Our security department protected the personal sphere of the most active participants of Euromaidan, whose names appeared in the media and who were prosecuted by the authorities. This work was organized by experienced activists from the times of Black Pora!. They instructed how to notice surveillance, how to spot provocateurs, and how to behave. We developed individual safety protocols (for example, living together because there were attempts to catch, arrest or mutilate individual activists; reporting our destinations when moving around the city so that friends would know where and with whom to look for us; avoiding walking alone, etc.). We had an action plan in case of an attack: lawyers and friends were on stand-by, ready to help at any moment. The system failed once when, on the orders of the authorities, the Titushky kidnapped Ihor Lutsenko, an activist of the Public Sector of Euromaidan, and Yuri Verbytsky, a Euromaidan activist, from the hospital (it was Ihor who had brought Yuri in with a concussion). In January 2014, both men were interrogated and tortured near the village of Hnidyn in the Boryspil region. They were then abandoned in the forest. Yuri died from his injuries, while Ihor managed to reach a human settlement. As soon as he was admitted to the hospital again, we tracked him down because we were looking for him tirelessly and were calling all the hospitals in Kyiv and the surrounding area. Incidentally, we used that same method to search for every person who went missing. We collected data in hospitals, police stations, detention centres, courts and morgues.

During public actions, we were able to distinguish provocateurs from representatives of the authorities. They must have been either criminals recruited by the authorities or plainclothes militiamen – I cannot say for sure. These people tried to instigate unjustified violence, called for shop windows to be smashed, etc. We printed leaflets with information on how to recognize a provocateur, even if he pretends to be a participant of Euromaidan. We "muted" such people in the crowd: if someone started shouting aggressive slogans, we chanted pro-European slogans in unison. We tried to spot a potential provocateur, and when we succeeded an activist would approach the rascal unnoticed and accompanied him like a shadow. If the situation escalated, it was possible to lead the pest out of the column and somehow neutralize or distract him.

When the authorities began to bring anti-Maidan activists and organized groups of Titushky to Kyiv, the security department began collecting information about the location of the opponents, their possible plans, etc.

During each march, we accompanied the columns, just like the organizers of other groups of influence. If an activist from the Euromaidan Public Sector was walking somewhere in the middle of the column, he or she would ask participants to adjust their pace to him or her because spreading out the column was dangerous as the outlier group risked being surrounded by provocateurs, kidnapped by policemen, or hit by cars. Someone always stood on the outskirts of the column and made sure that people did not go further out onto the unblocked street than traffic regulations allowed. Of course, these rules did not apply in the case of multi-thousand-people actions such as the one on December 1, 2013. They made no sense there because the crowd filled the entire space – both the sidewalks and the road. Car traffic would stop completely.

The route was always precisely marked out, and the organizers and participants knew it in advance. It was reported to the appropriate offices and made public so that the authorities could not accuse the organizers of acting arbitrarily. In Ukraine, citizens should inform the authorities about planned street actions, but they do not have to apply for permission. The right to protest in the streets is fundamental.

"Euromaidan is when you live in the centre of the city for weeks for free" – action by Euromaidan's media department
—
concept: Vasylyna Duman
drawing by Olexandra Navrotska

A pianist playing in front of Berkut forces
Authors of the action: Oleh and Markiyan Maceh
—
photo: Oleh Maceh

The column was always led by a person with a megaphone, and several activists with loudspeakers walked along the column, so people everywhere knew what was happening at the head of the march. They weren't bored; they could chant their favourite slogans.

Directly on the Maidan, the Public Sector participated in self-defence. During the attack on December 11, we maintained the "Lviv barricade" on Instytutska Street. Volodymyr Viatrovych, a Ukrainian historian, currently a deputy of the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine, participated in these events. The following method was invented to stop the attack: in several rows, people tightly linked their arms and thus created "live chains". It was difficult for the militiamen to break through such a human blockade. Security forces tried to pull individual participants out or attempted to squeeze inside. You had to be careful not to cause bodily harm to uniformed services employees but at the same time not to take a single step back. ○

○ / ○ / **Resisting the pressure of the uniformed officers is not an easy task; you can get injured both from blows with a baton and by the crowd, which is why we followed the principle of rotation of those who participated in this form of resistance. Demonstrators who had finished their "shift" were immediately replaced by new ones. There was uproar whenever the security forces used batons. A spotlight illuminated the attack from the stage and everything was filmed by journalists. The security forces did not manage to capture the Maidan at that time, although they were breaking through from all sides.**

They tried to use a water cannon, but it was taken away from them and blocked. This happened near the Kyiv City Hall building. Meanwhile, Vidsich members defended their barricade at Lach Gates.

The security at the entrances to the main square also ensured the protesters' safety. The 24-hour patrols were organized by one of the hundreds[4] of Public Sector members in the ranks of the self-defence without the involvement of the entire Public Sector in these processes.

The creative department, headed by me, formulated the main ideas and values of Euromaidan. We monitored people's mood and responded to how it was changing. We were particularly successful with the series of pictures "Euromaidan is…", made in the style of the good-natured caricatures of the American *Love Is* comics – popular in Ukraine in the 1990s – found in chewing gum inserts. This idea was mine and the drawings were made by the artist Olexandra Navrotska. They reflected the atmosphere on the Maidan with finesse and jokingly commented on situations that only the protesters themselves could understand. They quickly gained popularity, and over time this popularity travelled beyond the borders of the city, and then even of the country. If you understood one of these drawings, then you were part of a community. People recognized themselves in the drawings and posted them instead of their profile pictures on Facebook. Souvenir shops caught on to the trend: they printed pictures on magnets and sold them in underpasses even though we had assumed that the images would be free; we made the printable versions available free of charge on the internet.

Euromaidan is when you live for free in the city centre for weeks. A trip to Kyiv used to be an expensive pastime. Euromaidan made it more egalitarian, provided you like extreme tourism.

Euromaidan is when you decorate law enforcement officers along with the Christmas tree. One of the actions of the Euromaidan Public Sector involved sticking origami and fresh flowers onto members of the security forces, whose cordons were blocking the government district or surrounding the access roads to the Maidan. The officers tried not to move or talk to anyone. Sprinkled with decorations, they stopped being scary or threatening. The emotional tension among the protesters visibly decreased, and the mood improved palpably.

Euromaidan is when handing out buckwheat is not considered political bribery. In the years leading up to the Revolution of Dignity, corrupt old politicians in Ukraine tried to influence the election results by handing out food parcels to poorer voters. These sets always included buckwheat – a cheap staple food for Ukrainians. Civil society ridiculed this cynicism: poor people gave up their future to schemers in exchange for cheap food. Meals were prepared and distributed duringEuromaidan, and free field kitchens operated. Free food went from being a national shame to a symbol of unity.

Euromaidan is when you don't have to be ashamed of spending a night with an MP. In pre-revolutionary times, deputies, i.e. members of parliament, were regarded as rich, influential people who had acquired their wealth illegally. If someone cared about their reputation, they stayed away from MPs. Even speaking of opposition politicians, not all of them enjoyed a good standing, although there were decent people among them. And yet we needed every parliamentarian on the Maidan because the presence of persons with immunity status protected the protesters on night shifts from attacks by security forces. We appealed to oppositionists to unite in the "deputy guard" and come to the Maidan at night. Many answered our plea.

Euromaidan is when real-life "Berkut members" act as the background of your photos. The protesters showed that they were not afraid of the security forces. They often posed for photos against a background of the

4 The protesters on the Maidan were organized following the organization model of the Cossack army. The organizational units were hundreds, kurins, and so forth.
5 Shestydesiatniky – an unofficial term for a group of Ukrainian creative intelligentsia who, in 1956, created an informal movement for the revival of Ukrainian language and culture, defense against russification, and restoration of the silenced literary achievements of domestic classics and representatives of the Shot Revival of the 1920s.
6 Revolt of political prisoners in the Norilsk labour camp in the summer of 1953.

militia cordons. We dedicated one of the "Euromaidan is..." pictures to this wild form of entertainment.

Euromaidan is when you read the future from the stars... on the European Union flag.

The creative department designed leaflets for various Euromaidan Public Sector campaigns. For example, on February 14 our volunteers organized a souvenir lottery among the protesters. We made the lottery tickets from leaflets. They were handed out – intentionally – under the noses of the militiamen, as well as to them, actually. The illustrations for the leaflets (and other printed materials of the Public Sector) were made by my sister – the well-known Ukrainian artist Tetiana Duman, a revolutionary in the ranks of Black Pora! in 2004. We published poems on the leaflets, and then those poems circulated in text messages (smartphones were not as widespread then as they are today). In order to put additional psychological pressure on the uniformed officers (they saw that people on the Maidan were having a great time and began to doubt their own motivations), we distributed a poem among them: "leave your stupid grenades, throw your shield to the scrapyard, surrender to love."

Within the creative department, a group of women searched social networks to contact soldiers of the internal troops and other special forces (they had accounts mainly on the Russian VKontakte platform). These women engaged in discussions with the soldiers and convinced them that people at the Maidan had peaceful intentions. We learned that each time before they set off to our street operations they were forced to watch Russian news or films depicting provocateurs from December 1. We convinced many to sabotage their criminal orders and discouraged them from brutality. We weren't the only ones doing this: the wave of grassroots dialogues grew to such an extent that the authorities all over Ukraine had to search for Berkut members who would agree to take part in violent actions.

In addition to paper leaflets, we designed and distributed electronic information pamphlets on the internet, with tips on sabotage for uniformed officers, formulas for recognizing provocateurs, etc. We made infographics about Yanukovych's crimes and machinations, about dictatorial laws, about the scandalous 2014 budget that was adopted by the criminal authorities, and about boycotting goods sold by companies associated with the pro-government Party of Regions, and so on.

The need for a legal department gradually decreased as Ukrainian lawyers organized themselves into the Legal Hundred, then into the Euromaidan SOS, and even later into the Law Advisory Group, which still provides support in all matters related to Euromaidan. They handled the legal protection of protesters very well. We supported them with street actions (prepared by another department) that involved small groups of several people standing throughout Kyiv and in particularly frequented places of other cities in Ukraine holding posters with information about the victims and the need to hold the perpetrators accountable. Slogans such as "Don't fear, don't struggle! Unpunished evil is growing!" were used. This action is still held every month to honour the activists who suffered or died during Euromaidan.

Perhaps the most famous action of the Euromaidan Public Sector was a piano concert in front of a row of security forces. A photo of that event travelled around the world and became a symbol of the Revolution of Dignity. Oleh Maceh came up with this action, and playing the piano was his twenty-three-year-old son Markiyan, also a participant in the revolution.

We organized many actions. We used them to exert psychological pressure on the security forces, to keep up the revolutionary spirit, and to inform. Sometimes we took on tasks that were unusual for us. For example, after the victory of Euromaidan, Tetiana and I found a distributor of welding torches. Using those torches, we toppled the two-meter fence that the Yanukovych regime used to separate the Parliament from the public and prevent protests in front of the building. Sometimes at night I went on duty with the Maidan doctors, including Dr. Olena Bidovanets. They created their own professional initiative there.

Euromaidan as a building block in the metaphysical construction of the Ukrainian political nation

I consider Euromaidan to be an emergent system at its best. When many relevant people take small, simple actions, they ultimately create a harmonized mechanism.

What do I mean by "relevant" here? Robert Sapolsky cited an interesting example in his series of *Human Behavioural Biology* lectures at Stanford University. A long time ago, at a farmers' fair in the United States, it was a popular pastime to guess the weight of a bull. Various numbers came from the audience, and the arithmetic mean of all answers corresponded to the actual weight of the animal. Sapolsky noted that such precision is achieved only in groups of people with common experiences and skills that allow such an estimation. This principle also applies to other situations.

Effective self-organization into an emergent system is possible among people with specific experience. Ukrainians have passed that experience on from generation to generation – both throughout the period of struggle for survival in the conditions of the aggressive colonial policy of the Russian Federation, and later, under the yoke of the repressive machine of the prison of nations, namely the Soviet Union. Protests were frequent and took the form of public speeches and self-organization in gulags, addresses by intellectuals, and the underground. Later on, the Granite Revolution, then the Orange Revolution, and the Revolution of Dignity broke out. Even when the protests ended in failure, the memory of them was passed on. That memory included both the effects of the defeat and the ways in which defeat can be effectively counteracted.

This knowledge was passed on to my generation by our grandparents and our parents, and we teach it to our children. Many public organizations have had experience in organizing events, so there was a formula for dealing with situations in which the authorities would cross the line and go too far: they would go to the Maidan in their town, and then to the Maidan in Kyiv. More complicated formulas for these protests have also been developed. Groups of more active and organized citizens absorbed these instructions, implemented them, and passed them on.

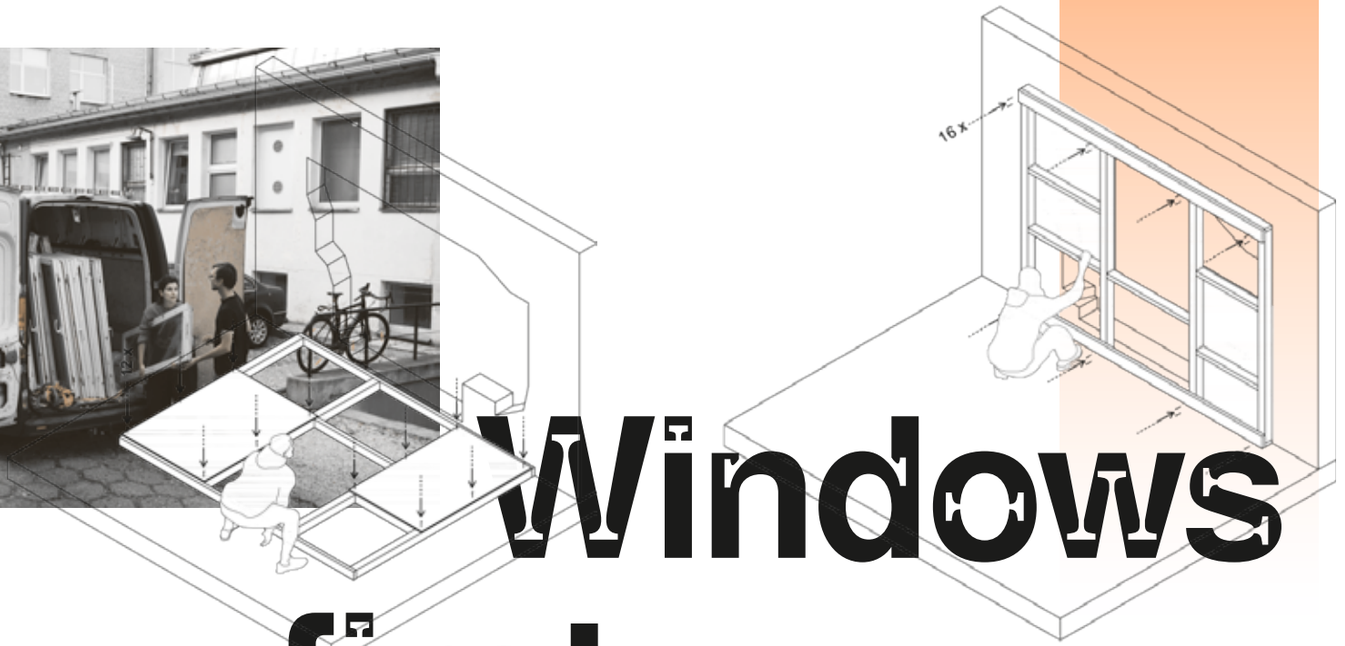
The victors of the Granite Revolution drew conclusions from the experiences of the Helsinki Human Rights Group, the Shestydesiatnyk protests,[5] and the Norilsk uprising.[6] Later, they would support and inspire the Orange Revolution; for example, the Ukrainian cultural activist Markiyan Ivashchyshyn went on hunger strike in 1990 and then helped Black Pora! in every possible way. Orange Revolution activists transferred and applied their experience in the Revolution of Dignity. When Russia attacked Ukraine in 2014, many of us, regardless of our experience in activism – whether long-standing or modest – went to the front lines and became involved in volunteering. The full-scale Russian invasion made two more simple blueprints of Ukrainian actions within the emergent system understandable: if you are attacked, enlist in the army; if you cannot do that, become a volunteer. Volunteering is made up of both novices and people with extensive experience, and the rules of conduct are simple and generally available: report, transport (people and materials), do no harm, be responsible.

Russian intellectuals describe the passive masses in their country as oppressed, dark, lacking empathy, selfish, greedy, and cruel. In Ukraine, the nation is political. Of course, there are demoralized citizens among us, but during important changes we act as a coherent system, and even the worst of us are capable of heroic deeds. That is why I love my country so dearly. ●

ALEKSANDRA KĘDZIOREK

TALKS WITH

ZOFIA JAWOROWSKA, MICHAŁ SIKORSKI AND PETRO VLADIMIROV



Windows first

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Elements of window assembly solution on wooden frame, from WINDOW DIY catalogue, elaborated by JKL architects' office

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BRDA Foundation team collecting windows from donors in Poland
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photo: Yevhen Stepanets

→
BRDA Foundation team collecting windows from private donors in Poland
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photo: Yevhen Stepanets

ALEKSANDRA KĘDZIOREK: You are presenting the Poetics of Necessity exhibition in the Polish Pavilion at the London Design Biennale (1–25 June 2023). This year's event has the theme The Global Game: Remapping Collaborations, with Het Nieuwe Instituut of Rotterdam as the first institution to curate the exhibition. Why do you think the biennale has taken up this topic now? How do you approach it in your exhibition?

MICHAŁ SIKORSKI: The theme of the biennale consists of two equally important parts: remapping and collaboration. I suppose that the experience of Aric Chen, the director of Het Nieuwe Instituut, makes him inclined to promote crossing traditional borders, either territorial or organizational: he comes from outside Europe, he works in the Netherlands, and he is curating the biennale in the UK. Chen represents the voice of the post-globalization-era generation – fluently moving from country to country, from continent to continent. Meanwhile, in recent years, the pandemic and the war have changed the way things worked in previous decades, specifically in the sphere of cooperation.

ZOFIA JAWOROWSKA: Today, we are not just reading about how the centre of geopolitics is moving away from Europe – we are experiencing it. China and India have a significant impact on our context. In Europe, the focus is moving eastwards. To that we need to add the social factor: in the face of the war and various crises, people's need for solidary thinking is activated; we seek a sense of security in acting together and sticking together. This instinct is transferred to various fields.

MS: In the theme of the biennale, I find the word 'remapping' the most interesting, and this is exactly what our project is about. On a national scale, we see that Poland is remapping itself as a community. It is redefining its position and the way it functions from the bottom up. After decades of chasing the West, we can turn around and see that as a community we have potential that we hadn't necessarily previously noticed and is different from conservative dreams. As a curatorial team, and within the scale of our activities, we have taken a similar path with this exhibition. Each of us comes from a different professional environment: Zofia is a translator who is active in NGOS; Petro has an art and curatorial background, while I have a typical architectural and urban design background. Based on our own experience and education, we remap what we can, focusing on the object of our interest: the reuse of building materials, mainly windows, primarily for humanitarian aid, but not exclusively so. ○

○ / ○ ZJ: Because each of us came into this collaborative effort with a different set of skills, knowledge and competences, everyone tells the project's story a little differently. I don't think that will change. After all, we are tackling something embedded in a changing context. The exhibition has its origins in an aid project to support Ukraine. Because of war damage, there is a pressing need for building materials. Ultimately, this will change; in fact, it already has. The number and variety of types of organisations involved in this aid are changing; the course of the war has been changing, too. Therefore, we believe that the interpretation of our pavilion will also be updated because it is very much embedded in the current reality.

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BRDA Foundation team collecting windows from donors in Poland
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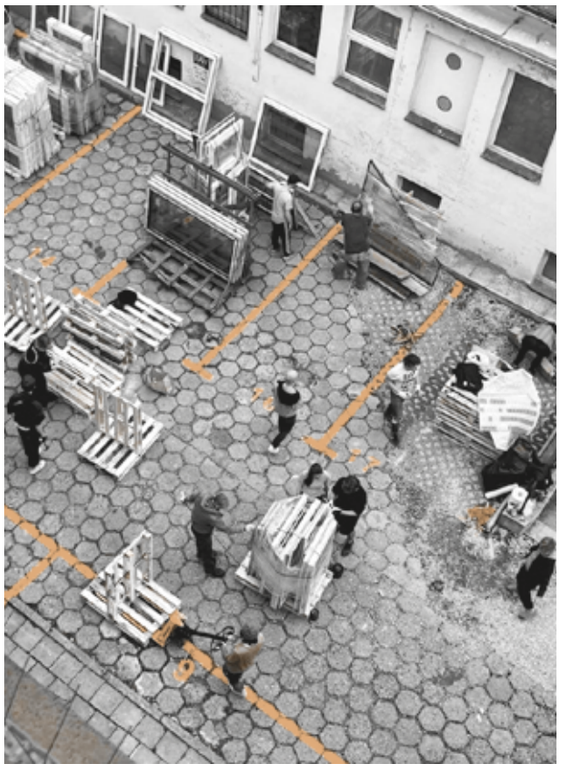
photo: Yevhen Stepanets



AK: As the concept of the exhibition has grown out of earlier grassroots initiatives, let us start by talking about the “Resources Group”. What was that about and is it still active?

ZJ: The Resources Group was active for 2 months. This was a rapid response to the beginning of the Russian military operation in Ukraine. The Group’s chief objective was to find accommodation, beds, mattresses, and places to stay in Polish homes for persons arriving at Warsaw West Railway Station from Ukraine. These people did not know where to go, where to turn for help. That phase ended in April 2022. It was challenging work, both physically and emotionally – fighting for some order amidst the chaos. Gradually the needs of those arriving in Poland have changed: those who were looking for accommodation for a few days, or those who had no skills or means to rent something on their own, were replaced by those looking for something more permanent, although the market did not make it easy or even possible. We were unable to meet these permanent needs. We decided to end our activities there and then, when we felt we had done some good, before the pressures ruined the quality of help that we were able to provide.

MS: The Resources Group was a grassroots initiative, completely spontaneous, with no legal status. It was started by Zofia and a handful of friends. In two months, relying on volunteers alone, they found accommodation for 5.5 thousand people. I observed these activities closely. The drive, the agency, the organisational power of the team were truly impressive. I saw that people equipped with specific tools and skills started using them, literally overnight, for totally new purposes. For instance, our friends who were professional producers, typically working in the shallow world of advertising, used their organisational and logistic skills, while software developers built applications, free of charge, to improve the efficiency of the assistance offered. We needed to solve database problems. At first, we did not know how to link the people who were ready to make accommodation available with the people who were arriving at Warsaw West and needed a place to stay. The open source app created at the time is still used and updated now; it comes in handy in other crisis situations.

AK: The grassroots movement in Poland, after Russia’s attack on Ukraine, was tremendous. The state and its institutions were slow to react. In a crisis situation, suddenly, it turned out that it is self-organisation.... ○

← Wrapping the windows for transport
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photo: BRDA Foundation

→ District #1 Foundation Team
—
photo: District #1

↓ WINDOW project volunteers’ team
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photo: BRDA Foundation

○ / ○ **ZJ: Yes, self-organisation! I believe this was one of the most important episodes in my life. We all felt that we were doing something good; furthermore, that we were acting in a safe way, and that we were hyper-well-organised. We were so proud to have managed that in a critical situation.**

AK: What is needed for self-organisation? Infra structure? People?

MS: The goal.

PETRO VLADIMIROV: And a network of contacts.

ZJ: Yes, a network of contacts is key to an action's success.

MS: Back then, the narrative was that the state system is failing, that Poland equals zrzutka.pl (a crowd-funding website)...

ZJ: Poland is the kingdom of self-organisation, but I don't know if that's always a good thing.

PV: It is an interesting observation, because I always thought it was Ukraine that was the kingdom of self-organisation.

ZJ: Of course, Ukrainians are one level above! In Poland, self-organisation is really doing well, according to the popular saying "Polak potrafi" (Poles can) – because Poles must manage somehow when the state turns out to be inadequate, failing. Self-organisation is beautiful, but it often results not from idealism or pure goodness of heart but from a situation in which someone else should react to a need, but they fail to do so.

PV: Ukraine can be quoted as an example of a country in which the authorities and society have long led separate, parallel lives, independent of one another. Euromaidan was built on the slogans of "people against government". People self-organised quickly and efficiently to achieve their objective. Since the outbreak of the current war, we have observed how the nation is turning into the state – how the two layers are merging, integrating.

AK: Do you envisage the possibility for the Resources Group to revive, to serve another purpose, if needed?

ZJ: I think so, and I think it can be done quickly and efficiently. For now, there is no need. Some of the former volunteers of the Resources Group have now joined the OKNO (WINDOW) initiative, for which they help to load windows for transport.

AK: That is the project you started together with Peter and the BRDA Foundation in June last year. Why did you start by collecting windows, of all things?

ZJ: I felt the need not to stop – to go on working. Previously, I worked for NGOs, and I understood it was time to start something of my own. I was involved with the issues of housing and building, and I wanted to continue in that field, but I realised that help for persons from Ukraine had reached its maximum capacity at the grassroots level, and it would be difficult to find a niche or a field to tackle. We reached the moment when the institutions of the city and the state needed to take over.

Unloading the windows arriving from Poland at the District #1 Foundation warehouse in Kyiv

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photo: District #1

Volunteers at the bus station in Warsaw
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photo: Grupa Zasoby

I also realised I would not be able to handle activity that would be emotionally extremely taxing – direct confrontation with the theme of war – so the war had to remain in the background. I met Petro only after the war broke out. We started to work together, combining our expertise and Petro's knowledge of Ukraine, and we arrived at the conclusion that there was a shortage of windows in grassroots reconstruction.

PV: In an explosion, the windows are the first to go. In Ukraine, most of the windows are of poor quality; they are not triple-glazed plastic windows but rather wooden windows from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. They fall out even if the explosion occurs a few hundred metres away and the property has not been damaged. Before the war, 80 per cent of window frames and glass were imported into Ukraine from Russia and Belarus. The only Ukrainian glass factory was located in the town of Lysychansk in the Donbas region.

It was partially destroyed when Lysychansk was occupied. The price of building materials went up. When we were working on this project, Ukraine had regained the Kyiv and Chernihiv region as well as part of the Kharkiv region. People were returning from Poland and finding their houses had no windows, so we decided that it was windows that would be most needed.

ZJ: They are still needed. Almost all of the windows we have sent to Ukraine so far have gone to private individuals. The new owners are installing them in their homes using DIY methods to gain protection from the cold, wind and rain, and a basic form of security.

It is worth mentioning that this project is 95 per cent based on recycled windows. We can obtain these windows free of charge; new ones are monstrously expensive. We wanted to find a way of supporting the reconstruction that was low-cost but at the same time effective and well quantifiable, so that the help would be tangible and, of course, visible.

AK: In doing so, you have become part of the much-discussed topic of the circulation of materials in architecture.

MS: We had been interested in this subject before, but we lacked the impetus to translate the experience of the Belgians at Rotor studio or the Swiss from baubüro in situ into the context of our own activities. The war provided the impetus – a meaningful application and motivation. Indeed, the WINDOW project is part of the Zeitgeist that is connected to the popularisation of reusable building materials. Anything that avoids the need to produce new materials makes sense because it reduces carbon emissions and preserves energy resources.

AK: How is this organised? Do you collect windows in Poland, ship them to Ukraine, and then immediately distribute them to private individuals, or do other organisations act as intermediaries?

PV: The bottom-up reconstruction in Ukraine is experimental. When we started the WINDOW project, we made contact with five community organisations in Ukraine. In the course of our work, some of them have changed their objectives, becoming involved in the removal of debris from areas affected by

"Loudhailer" for the railway station, indispensable for the organisation of teamwork
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photo: Grupa Zasoby

the armed conflict. We have built the longest and most fruitful relationship with the District #1 Foundation, which operates in the Kyiv, Chernihiv and Kherson regions. It was this team that took Polish windows and began distributing them to private individuals.

AK: Before February 2022, District #1 brought together individuals who wanted to develop Kyiv's nightlife and dealt with fashion and open-air events. After the Russian invasion, they immediately changed their operations and started using their resources to rebuild homes...

MS: ...and from ultimate hedonism, they turned to ultimate altruism.

PV: When we started collaborating, they were already going from one town liberated from Russian occupation to another and helping rebuild the demolished houses: they were replacing windows, installing roofs. It was then that they had an idea to raise cheap wood-framed homes for fast assembly. By winter, they had three of those built; now they are planning to build about fifty more. They are veritable real estate developers by now. (laughs)

ZJ: But they are building from donated materials, so it's a rather different business model!

MS: They are certainly as effective as real estate developers, though.

PV: It is interesting to observe how people who used to go to help remove rubble are now beginning to build houses. This change happened over nine months – super fast, and it is indeed wonderful. They receive the windows from us and then manage the needs on the ground. By coincidence – but stemming from need – whenever Ukraine recovers some territory, this is where our windows go. More than half of them went to Kherson.

ZJ: In fact, 56 per cent in 2022 to be precise, although this is difficult to track exactly: there is a war going on and our partners are very busy. Currently, among other things, they have been building modular houses for families who have lost their homes, so we have only partial documentation from the field. I believe it highly possible for someone to read about our project in Ukrainian media and say: "I will take care of those windows for Kherson. I will take a truck, get in, bring the windows, and distribute them among my fellow citizens in Kherson district." We are talking to District #1, and these conversations will be part of the catalogue for the London Design Biennale exhibition – and from these conversations, we will know in more detail what was happening on the Ukrainian end. For now, we know the statistics – what went where, how

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TREE Group dismantling windows of Atrium Plaza building
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photo: Kuba Rodziewicz

↓
Atrium Plaza building
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photo: Kuba Rodziewicz

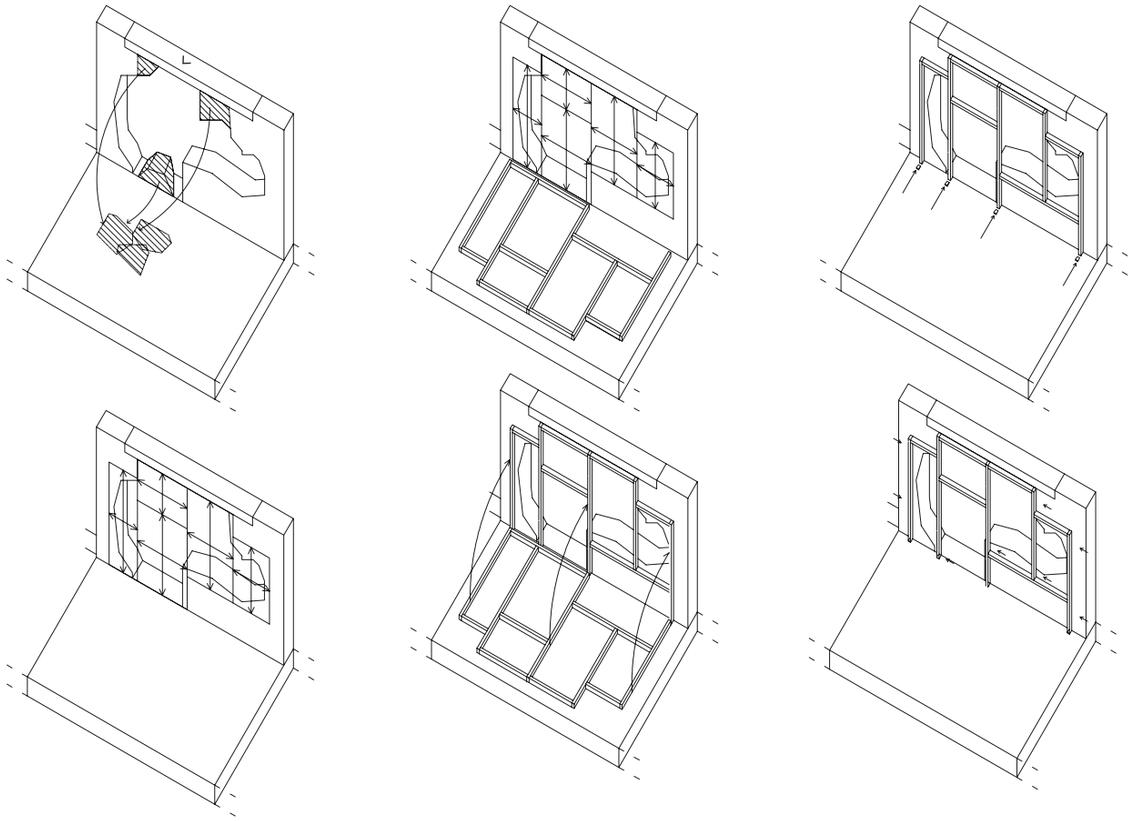
they took care of it, we have photographic documentation, but so far we have not had time to talk at length, heart to heart. The results are good, and we've gone on to the second edition of the program. We're going further afield: we'll be sending windows to Kharkiv and Kherson.

AK: So, self-organisation is also needed on the other end. Most NGOs donate the funds collected for Ukraine to institutions. The strength of your project is that the aid goes directly to individual people or grassroots groups such as District #1.

PV: The way I see it, the state and its institutions are now busy with the war, whereas the reconstruction efforts are grassroots work. People are not waiting for someone to come and give them things. If they are able to assemble a window and if they have the necessary materials, then they will do it, no problem. To support them, we have put together instructions as part of the project – showing different methods of installing windows, which is especially useful if the window is too small or too narrow for the window opening.

MS: Not everyone can install a window themselves. It's not easy if you have a mixture of windows from different places, and of different types and sizes. It is not often that a recycled window fits perfectly into the opening left by the broken one. So, how do you fit a window that is too big or too small? Miastopracownia studio – curators of DoFA, the Lower Silesian Festival of Architecture – asked Zofia and me to lead a workshop as part of the festival. The topic that we set for the workshop was this seemingly simple question: how do you fit a window of a given size into an opening of a different size?

Working with the students was super interesting. Instead of reinventing the whole world and tearing down the foundations of architecture, as sometimes happens in such workshops, we asked the students to draw the details. The results were so interesting that the topic was picked up by the architects from the Prolog group (who also participated in the festival). Then, together as part of the BRDA Foundation, we created an open source catalogue showing various possibilities for



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An element of the solution from WINDOW DIY catalogue
—
Elaborated by naive architects' office

→
Assembly materials for one of the solutions from WINDOW DIY catalogue
—
Elaborated by JKL architects' office

→
Slanted window detail from WINDOW DIY catalogue
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photo: elaborated by students (Matylda Wolff, Marina Alimpieva, Daniil Davidyuk, Maciej Smoląg) and by TŁO architects' office

assembly. It is reminiscent of the instruction manuals that come with Ikea products. This is an example of remapped collaboration: we initiated it at the invitation of the curators, then the idea was picked up by others and complemented by other studios. Now we have taken it back and are presenting the results as part of an exhibition at the London Design Biennale.

AK: Before we go back to talking about the exhibition, please explain why you started demolishing the Warsaw Atrium office building.

ZJ: It wasn't us! It was the investor and the demolition company! Our participation in this is purely symbolic. It started with the Strabag company deciding to donate 215 windows from the demolition of this building. With frames. That's the most important thing with demolition windows, because without frames you only get a fixed window that cannot be opened or tilted. Windows with frames are sought after and the company's employees did make an extra effort during demolition not to break or cut the frames, but to dismantle them in their entirety. We have sent them to Kyiv and Kharkiv.

Atrium has given way to larger developments, but it is an example of quality construction from the 1990s. We saw in such demolitions an opportunity to source materials on a larger scale – not just windows. We want to get involved in this, to donate some of the materials to aid efforts in Ukraine and Poland, and to sell some of them and thus raise funds to continue the WINDOW project. So far, we have operated based on donations and grants, but it would make sense to continue working while there is still a need for windows in Ukraine. If we raise funds by selling materials from demolition to be reused or recycled, then everyone wins. We joined forces with the Polish National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning, under the BUDO project. As a Foundation, we are responsible for the logistic-organisation component of that project: we gather information about building demolitions and materials from those demolitions. We are hoping to launch a shop that will finance our activities and will provide a useful tool at the same time. The other potential lies in our expertise and research capacity. In collaboration with the National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning, we are preparing an exhibition: a requiem for the Atrium building that tells its history and introduces its architects, users, and the demolition company. We also propose using the knowledge of the Widoki studio – authors of a research project about the aid centre for persons from Ukraine which functioned in the Atrium building. Many interesting things were happening in there, for instance, counter-terrorist training was conducted. It turns out that this is not uncommon in buildings designated for demolition.

PV: The case of Atrium is important in the context of reuse. In 2020, a taxonomy regulation came into force in European Union countries that promotes environmentally sustainable investments.

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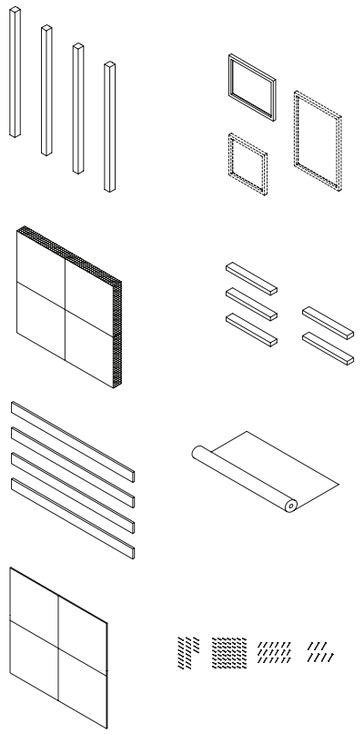
Cover of the WINDOW DIY catalogue



Demolition materials have to be reprocessed somehow – something has to be done with them. It is a good solution to donate them to humanitarian aid. Large demolition and development companies are beginning to understand that it should not be all thrown away as rubbish; the circulation of materials can have a tangible benefit – it has social potential. We are witnessing changes in how the construction industry thinks.

MS: We witnessed a similar process in the area of working remotely, from home. It was not possible, but then the lockdown happened, and suddenly it was possible. We believe the same thing will happen with reusing materials from demolition. In the context of war, they became useful in terms of helping others, and processes that even a few months before were unthinkable in our economic situation suddenly – overnight – became rationalised and legitimised. And they will probably stay with us a while longer, rather like Zoom or Teams meetings.

ZJ: In my opinion, however, they have a longer way to go. We met with representatives of Cyrkl company, which specialises in recycling and reusing construction waste and all sorts of industrial waste. They find clients for these kinds of materials; it is a very interesting model of operations. We spoke at length about different opportunities for reusing materials from demolition. There are many factors to consider – and they all really need to be considered. Firstly, some materials legally qualify as waste. ○

○ / ○ / How can you bring the waste back onto the market? After all, waste is not traded. Secondly, demolition companies derive a profit from diverting these materials at their discretion. How do we encourage them to share part of their earnings with NGOs, for example? How to involve designers in these activities? If they know that some materials are going to be dismantled at a given time, they could use them. Could there be a system for reserving these materials? How do you guarantee that they will be available? How do you create a database of them?

How do you describe them? How do you re-certify them? Linking all the threads is very complicated, and I don't think anyone in Poland has dealt with this before.

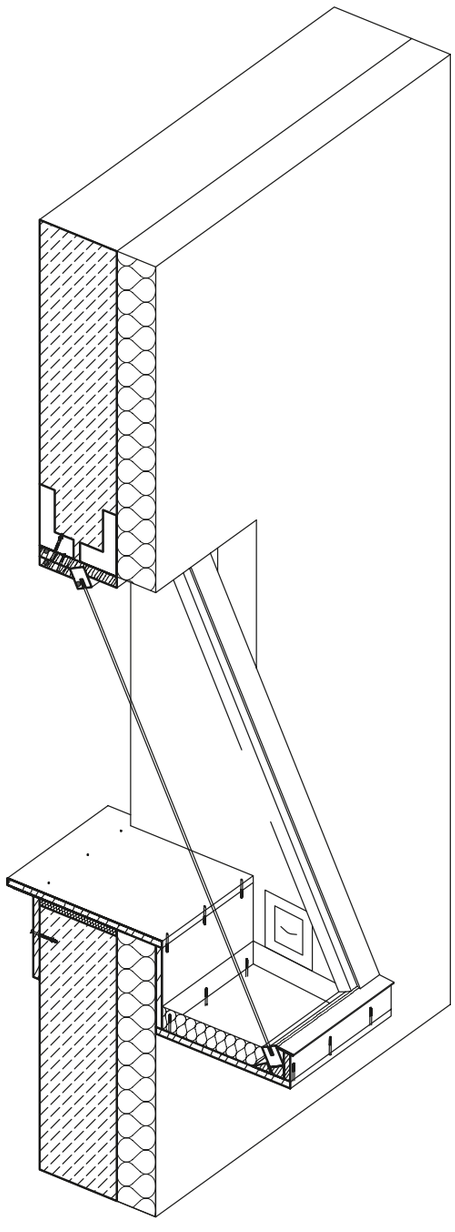
MS: In other European countries, however, enthusiasts have been exploring the subject for years. A whole league of avant-garde material reuse has come together; it is an open environment. Everyone is keen to help one another.

AK: Zosia spoke about a company that breathes new life into materials from building demolitions, and about your own plans to finance the Foundation's activities from the sale of materials for reuse. Michał mentioned that the Belgian Rotor Foundation is operating a store selling such materials. All these activities are grassroots – not part of a top-down material reuse registration system. Is the material reuse movement mainly based on self-organisation?

MS: They are grassroots, but they are all aiming to build a structure: creating databases and systems. They want to get into the mainstream. Barbara Buser from baubüro in situ also speaks about this in an interview for our exhibition catalogue: she encourages everyone to do something similar, because this is how the idea will be disseminated. I think recycled materials will follow the same trajectory as photovoltaic cells and energy-efficient buildings. A few decades ago, people who were reaching for these solutions were seen as niche post-hippies; today, such policies are top-down mandated at European level.

ZJ: Barbara Buser's RE-WIN project also sends windows to Ukraine; off her own bat, Buser incorporates large amounts of recycled materials into architectural designs. She recently sent a truck full of reclaimed items such as furniture, sanitary objects and so on to the CO-HATY group, which equips vacant buildings in Ukraine and adapts them to the needs of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons).

MS: Many people independently undertake similar activities. Lara Moutin was involved with sourcing windows for Beirut when, in 2020, windows were shattered in a ten-kilometre radius of a gigantic explosion



at the port. In any conflict zone or emergency situation, windows and doors are among the first-line essentials.

PV: Lara Moutin's project is called Windows for Beirut, but it is different from ours. She did not import windows from neighbouring countries, but she focused on distributing the funds she collected in the target location. Members of her team created a supply chain of sorts: they bought glass from one entrepreneur, paid another entrepreneur to cut it to measure, and yet another to fit it in the window frame. This was also a great example of self-organisation.

ZJ: That's why we felt it was important to highlight in the Polish Pavilion at the London Design Biennale, in the exhibition space and the accompanying catalogue – in the context of the theme of Remapping Collaborations – that windows are a universal object, needed in all places where a crisis befalls. In the catalogue, we showcase Barbara Buser's work in Switzerland, Windows for Beirut in Lebanon, and our WINDOW project, and we look at how these threads intertwine and outline the broader theme of remapping collaborations.

AK: We are talking in February, when the exhibition is still under construction. What is it going to look like?

MS: We came up with a simple set-up of two adjacent rooms: one recreates the warehouse space where the windows are stored, and the other is a symbolic representation of the domestic space with examples of their reuse. We are engaging the London Design Biennale – a popular education-cum-entertainment-cum-commercial event – to organise another windows collection. The windows collected in London will go to Poland, and ultimately to Ukraine. ○

London, it involves a few dozen windows, due to the limitations of the exhibition space and the likely load on the ceilings of the exhibition building. We could rescale the event for a larger space.

ZJ: It is a dream of mine that the project "catches on" and we will find other window donors. Perhaps it will draw new people in. I am open to window franchising. Sending windows from the United Kingdom – that is, from outside the European Union – will be a challenge, but such franchising is simple enough within the EU. Soon we will be talking to Concular studio in Berlin, which also deals with reuse of construction materials. We sent them our catalogue of DIY solutions, just to say "hey, look what we've done." They responded that they found it interesting and that they would like to talk because they have access to a large number of windows from demolition. Perhaps the Berlin franchise will happen sooner rather than later.

AK: It's great that one activity gives spontaneous rise to another and that you have been networking with other organisations working on similar themes. What other themes have you smuggled into the exhibition space? ○

○ / ○ / **PV: In this way, we want to show a not run-of-the-mill way of helping Ukraine and, simultaneously, broaden the perception of the exhibition as a means of achieving additional goals. An exhibition does not have to be limited to presenting something that has already happened; it can also encourage future action. The understanding of the exhibition shifts from the object on display to the process itself – to what happens to the objects after the biennale is over.**

ZJ: Of course, it would be nice if our exhibition also travelled a bit. After the exhibition in London, the windows that are the central object of this space will disappear because they will already be in Ukraine, so we will have to acquire more windows for each place we visit.

MS: The exhibition is a protocol that can be implemented in different locations. In

PV: Our exhibition is primarily about the theme of reuse but triggered by social action. This is an interesting issue. The reuse of building materials is usually discussed in the context of ecology and environmental protection: it reduces the carbon footprint and thus helps to fight global warming. We are looking at this issue from an unprecedented angle: the social nature of reusing building materials in times of crisis. Polish people are eager to donate windows to us and are curious to see where these windows will be sent.

MS: It is also about aesthetics. The aesthetic thread, implicit in the title of our exhibition, seems crucial to us: familiar definitions of architecture – with the Vitruvian triad of permanence, utility and beauty at the forefront – have taken on new depths in the context of reuse. Architecture is at an interesting juncture. We have the impression that aesthetics resulting from the reuse of building materials and new definitions of rationality are beginning to crystallise. 'Aesthetics' is a more capacious term than a mere opinion that something is pretty or not; it is about a more in-depth meaning that is woven from different values. Over the past decades, architecture has been strongly associated with the designer's ego, with style, with a recognisable aesthetic. This phenomenon culminated, of course, with the arrival of the architect superstars. This is not the kind of architecture that you can design with reclaimed materials. ○

In the exhibition, we are showing an object with the working name of 'The Totem': an example of how to mount a window that does not fit into an opening. There is also a curtain made from building materials and a seat made from recycled extruded polystyrene. So, we are modestly experimenting with designing objects from reclaimed and recycled materials.

PV: It is a design biennale, after all.

ZJ: We respond in multiple ways to the biennale's main theme: Remapping Collaborations. The area of recycled materials engages a myriad of collaborative issues.

MS: I must say that in my professional life I have never previously encountered such good will as that which exists in the reclaimed materials niche. I think this is characteristic of people committed to a higher cause. In the pursuit of a noble goal, partisan interests and the designer's own wellbeing become secondary to the drive to systemically change ways of doing things.

ZJ: Studios that use reclaimed materials in their designs are eager to share their good practice examples and their knowledge, to talk about their experience. Their attitude has aid potential. Recycling reclaimed material and its reuse in a new context is also a form of collaboration – or at least a form of dialogue between the old architect and the new designer. ●

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Petro Vladimirov, Michał Sikorski and Zofia Jaworowska testing the sofa made of XPS reusable boards – an element of the exhibition
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photo: Jedrzej Sokołowski / Instytut Adama Mickiewicza

○ / We assemble buildings from fragments that are durable and utilitarian, but we don't fully control the aesthetics of the final product. Nor can we recycle these materials excessively, as such interference would be missing the point – it would increase energy consumption and the carbon footprint. We design buildings that are easy to demolish. When I started my studies, as a role model I was given a Swiss architect who would have concrete poured over and over again until perfection was achieved. This was how he demonstrated total control of and mastery over his work. Working with secondary materials precludes such behaviour, but this does not mean that designers have to give up on aesthetics. It's just that these aesthetics will be different. We are curious to see what will be born out of it.

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Testing the assembly of elements for the Poetics of Necessity exhibition
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photo: Jedrzej Sokołowski / Instytut Adama Mickiewicza

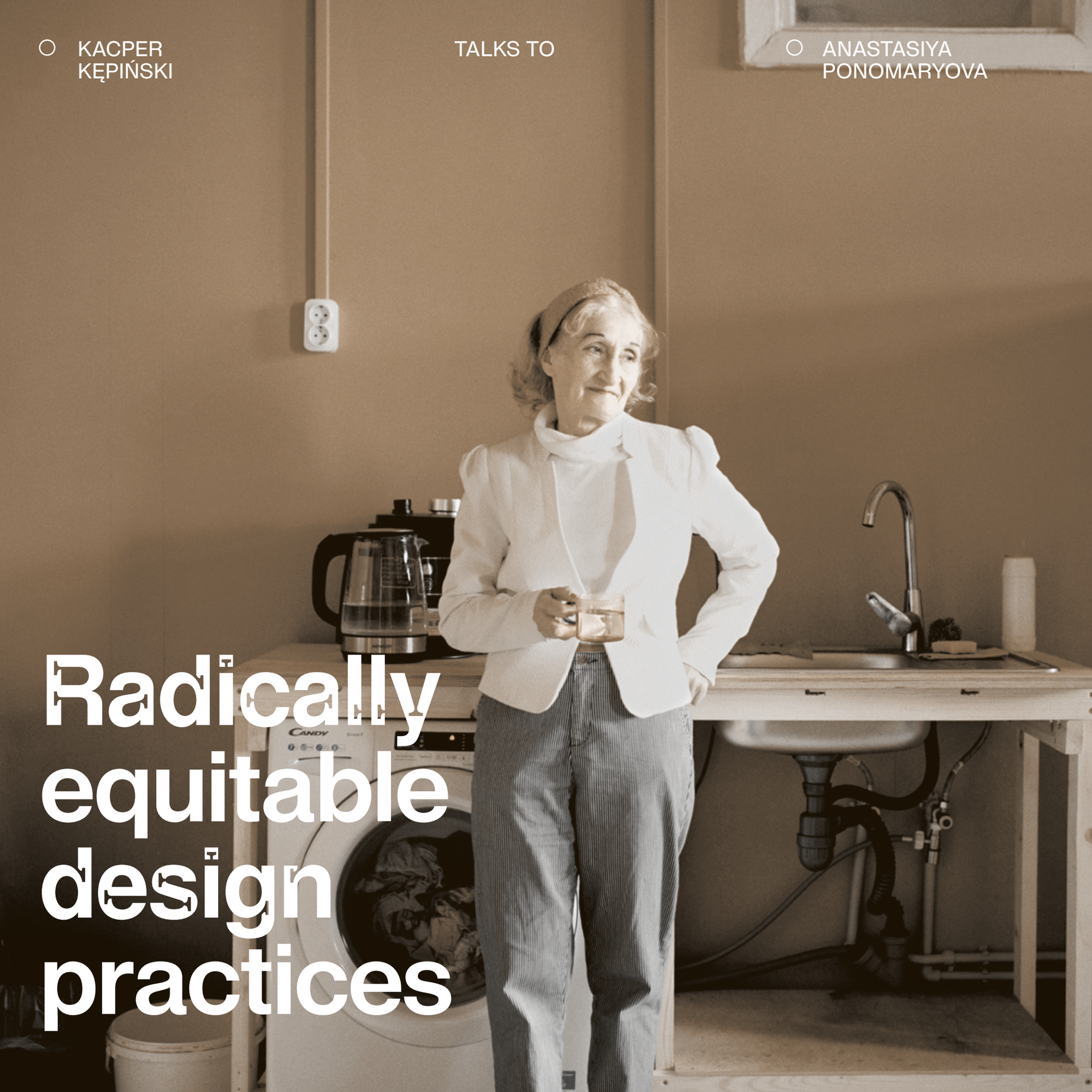
The exhibition of the Polish Pavilion at the London Design Biennale was organised by Instytut Adama Mickiewicza (Adam Mickiewicz Institute). An important element of the project was the "Windows for Ukraine" collection, conducted by the BRDA Foundation with the support from IAM and the Polish Institute in London.

On 1 June 2023, Polish-Ukrainian presentation *Poetics of Necessity* received first prize, awarded To the most outstanding overall contribution at the London Design Biennale.

KACPER KĘPIŃSKI

TALKS TO

ANASTASIYA PONOMARYOVA



Radically equitable design practices

The CO-HATY project aims to provide housing for internally displaced persons who have been forced to flee their hometowns in eastern Ukraine due to the Russian invasion. It began with the adaptation of an abandoned student dormitory in Ivano-Frankivsk. The initiators were a group of employees of the Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical University of Oil and Gas, and activists from the Metalab, Urban Curators and Critical Myslennia initiatives. Coupled with architectural knowledge, previous experience in conducting grassroots projects and urban planning interventions influences the projects implemented by CO-HATY. What comes to the fore is the desire to create functional, beautiful, and safe spaces for the development of social bonds. From the very beginning, the adaptation process has assumed people's participation in this community design and construction work.

KACPER KĘPIŃSKI: CO-HATY is a project funded from many sources and run by many people from different organizations. How did you all meet? How did this initiative come about?

ANASTASIYA PONOMARYOVA: The core team was formed in the second half of March 2022. It was created by people from Ivano-Frankivsk and internally displaced persons who sought refuge in this city in the first weeks of the war. They gathered around a local group called Metalab. Since the beginning of the war, Metalab members have been actively involved in humanitarian aid and other activities; for instance, they designed and manufactured Czech hedgehogs. They helped find accommodation for me and many other people who, like me, had fled from various regions of Ukraine. They quickly realized that there would be shortage of space, and they saw how big that shortage was, so they started looking for a solution. My role in this process was to support their ideas and to emphasize that what counts is the help offered not only to one's friends but also to strangers in dire circumstances – strangers who have come or are considering coming to Ivano-Frankivsk. CO-HATY was created as a result of the decision to solve this problem. It was empathy that helped us define the main assumptions of the initiative, and thanks to that empathy we began to act at the early stage of the Russian aggression before mainstream organizations addressed the shortage of accommodation in the Ivano-Frankivsk region.

KK: What were the competencies of the people who were involved in the project at the very beginning? Were you invited because you are an architect? Or did the project ultimately take shape based on the backgrounds of the people who make up the team?

AP: People are the priority – it is the team and the friendships we have made within it. In the environment we have created, bonds between group members are deeply valued. They add up to some kind of soft cooperation, something different than the models known from start-ups or business organizations. We have a healthy relationship based on mutual trust. Everyone feels that his or her voice will always be heard. We perform our tasks in a structure without the hierarchy typical of offices or enterprises that operate according to market principles. ○

○ / Our group is without doubt interdisciplinary as we have many members with various types of education and experience; having said that, the core team consists of people who were involved in architecture before the war. They have a bit more responsibility on their shoulders, and yet their current job is not strictly about design. They typically act as coordinators, strategists, curators of participatory projects, and they make the most important decisions. We like to plan and to arrange space, but the current situation does not allow us to limit ourselves to this type of task. You could say that we take on the role of a meta-architect: we design, but we also perform many other duties which are necessary for such a large-scale undertaking.

KK: So, you knew each other before you started working together?

AP: Yes. The people who manage projects or deal with fundraising in CO-HATY previously knew each other on a personal or professional level. I used to work with Metalab, so after escaping from Kyiv I contacted this organization first. For me, Metalab was a professional gateway to life in Ivano-Frankivsk. Our close and distant friends and acquaintances are still joining the project; you could say that the core team of CO-HATY consists of people from the architectural milieu who were friends before February 2022. The Ukrainian community of architects and city planners is relatively small; therefore, pretty much everyone knew each other well. Gradually, people from outside our milieu found out about us. Either they liked the way we work, or they just wanted to do something useful. Many of them have skills that are highly valuable to our activities, and new competences are acquired and developed extremely quickly in times of war and intensified operations. The third group of people who make up CO-HATY are internally displaced persons. Previously, they did not know the activists of Metalab or Urban Creators, but they became involved in the project because they wanted to help others in a similar situation. There are about five such persons in CO-HATY. They are responsible for "soft" tasks, such as organizing the community

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Former kindergarten in Ivano-Frankivsk, renovated and turned into accommodation with 140 beds by Metalab
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photo: Stepan Lisovskyi

and coordinating the work of volunteers.

KK: How many people work in CO-HATY in total? Has the composition of the group changed over time?

AP: There are about twenty of us, and the composition of the group (apart from the core team) obviously changes. The highest number of committed people joined at the beginning of last summer, when we were doing our pilot project. We experienced a real organizational leap then; indeed, it was a quite a challenge, managing such a large group of people. This was certainly not a good precedent as generally, in my opinion, organizations should not develop this way. The situation at that time forced us to grow rapidly from six to twenty people within a month.

KK: Did everyone realise what they were getting into? Did they live permanently in Ivano-Frankivsk, or did they move there specifically to work?

AP: I came to Ivano-Frankivsk without a plan. I just wanted to get out of Kyiv. The CO-HATY initiative was created when internally displaced people, me included, contacted Metalab. We must have had a huge potential for self-organization as it is quite amazing that we managed to create this project so quickly.

KK: What impact did the dynamic situation on the front have on your plans and project implementation? What did you need to adjust or modify during the design or implementation phase?

AP: War affects every dimension of our lives. The market for construction materials has changed significantly, and CO-HATY has had to adapt to the new reality. Our cooperation with Windows (the BRDA Foundation) and with other organizations resulted from changes in the market and from the need to find new methods of obtaining building materials. Our work was perhaps most palpably re-defined by military mobilization, due to which CO-HATY lost many important members. Bohdan Wołynski, who had been involved in the project from the beginning, was drafted into the army less than a month after the start of our operation. Mobilization continues; in some places in Ukraine, representatives of the Armed Forces sometimes take people straight from construction sites. Therefore, it is difficult for us to manage work, especially men's work. War also affects our emotions. Many of us have lost family members and friends, or their loved ones are in danger. We are trying to support each other. If we see that someone is in a bad mental condition, we divide their tasks between us. We experience many technical problems, such as power outages. Half a day without electricity can significantly delay construction works, and electricity usually stops flowing when we urgently need to make some repairs.

KK: I saw on Instagram that at the beginning you used your own photovoltaic installations for small projects. Are they still in use? Are you still experimenting with them? Or perhaps you've managed to apply them on a larger scale?

AP: We have tackled the topic of energy efficiency, albeit to a limited extent. You could say that we have taken the first step and tested the solutions for the abandoned buildings that we are renovating. We wanted to demonstrate that we were actively looking for alternative energy sources. We have a long way to go before we implement these solutions on a broader scale. We adapt old buildings, but the installations within them tend to be in very poor condition and usually need to be replaced. We want to use energy-saving solutions that would make the facilities independent of the power grid: heat pumps, solar panels, small wind farms, heat recovery. Unfortunately, these solutions are very expensive, and we cannot make the necessary changes while relying on small homemade devices alone. We use the panels that we have constructed as an addition to soft modernization activities; and because we make them ourselves, other people (for instance, the residents) can copy them. Without changing the entire installation system in the buildings, it will not be possible to introduce our environmentally friendly solutions.

KK: Do future residents work with you, or do they move into ready-made accommodation? ○

Former hotel in Ivano-Frankivsk, 80 beds, adapted by Metalab
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photo: Nastia Kubertt

○ / ○ **AP: We involve residents in our activities. At CO-HATY we rely on volunteer work, which allows us to reduce construction costs, but what matters most is solidarity activities and the opportunity to cooperate with people who share the same value system. This is truly helpful, especially when we are struggling with the reality of war and its consequences. Of course, the composition of the group of volunteers is always changing, but five people have been working with us from the beginning and we remain in frequent contact. They come to the openings of buildings, even those they have not worked on. Volunteers create an interesting community; in the CO-HATY environment you can gain practical knowledge, new skills, and experience.**

KK: What is the scale of your project? How many buildings have you already adapted and made available, and how many do you still plan to transform?

We have completed four buildings, for a total of eight hundred residents. The largest of these facilities, located in Kamianets-Podilskyi, has a total area of over two thousand square meters.

CO-HATY pilot project
in Ivano-Frankivsk, 170 beds,
adapted by Metalab
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photos: Nastia Kubertt, Bohdan
Volynskyi

KK: Have you been present in the life of the community since the building opened? Does the participatory work method impact the way that residents organize their lives?

AP: We have adopted community development as one of the main tenets of our project. After the renovation works are complete, we cannot leave the residents to their own devices because we know that no one else will teach them how to create a community; no one will support them in solving problems or show them how to alleviate the problems caused by the conflict. In each of the facilities that we put into use – whether community centres or residential buildings – we commit ourselves to organizing community life for at least three months. At least one person then serves as an on-site coordinator and helps introduce basic rules which make it easier for the residents to get to know each other, talk about additional, essential infrastructure, and get to know the city. If time allows, we try to show them how to become a community coordinator, or how to implement a small project in the common space surrounding the building. We consider this to be the necessary minimum for the integration of residents – for community building. CO-HATY's mission is to create safe, self-sufficient communities that are able to independently solve their own problems, find jobs, and even look for better accommodation. We would like resident communities to develop their own customs and implement their own projects. It is also important to eliminate economic problems, which is why we want the rents to be as low as possible. So, we have this concept of an ideal self-sufficient community, but making this concept reality is totally beyond our capabilities or control.

KK: What is the role of institutions in this process? Are they involved in the construction work or in stimulating the lives of the residents, or do they stand aside? Have you filled the institutional gap with your actions?

AP: I admit that I haven't visited the project in Ukraine for several months now, so I don't know the current situation. I've noticed – and I know that the rest of the team share this view – that state institutions and local governments have a pretty archaic idea of humanitarian aid. They do not believe that a community of internally displaced persons can become self-sufficient; they see these people as fragile and weak, and they want to help them at a basic level, providing them with various types of products and medical assistance. True, all this is important, but what is much more important is the belief that these people can overcome the impasse and actively engage – acting on their own behalf and on behalf of others. This approach distinguishes CO-HATY from other projects. We try to involve the residents at various stages – from planning to community organization. We also talk to the creators of other initiatives and try to convince them to modify their plans by, for example, enriching their utility program with a canteen or a co-working space. Instead of giving people food, let us help them find jobs. Although this statement sounds like a cliché, it is sometimes difficult to actually implement it in a project.

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Former student dormitory in Kamanyets-Podilskiy, 250 beds, adapted by Metalab
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photo Ołeksandr Demianiw

KK: Do you think that Ukrainians have special predilections or competences that are helpful in this type of activity? Did Euromaidan or other experiences affect your ability to self-organize?

AP: You've raised a great research problem for anthropologists and sociologists. I formulated the thesis that for some reason in Ukraine we have developed a culture of building support networks. Perhaps it is that our local authorities are weak and have little agency; perhaps it is that they do not care. So, we have some kind of freedom, but many problems remain unsolved because no grassroots initiatives are addressing them. People need to organize and act. On the scale of the whole country and given the weight of the problems that we face in our cities, the community of urban activists is small, but it is also well networked and knowledgeable in the activities of individual organizations, so we know where to turn for help. Thanks to all these connections, we also know each other in personal capacity. In my opinion, the feeling that we cannot rely on local or state institutions strongly bonds us with our family, friends, and people in similar social groups. Perhaps civil society is active because no authorities are doing what they should be doing, and even when they try to do it, it comes out clumsy or inept.

KK: How has architectural practice changed? What attitudes do you observe in the architectural community? Do architects find ways to practice their profession in these conditions? ○

○ / **AP: I've noticed how easy it is for architects to take the initiative and take an active attitude. Currently, it is clearly visible who is involved, who takes on the role of the organizer, and who performs smaller tasks. Some of the architects decided that it would be best to wait the war out; for others, the limit of their engagement is taking part in a competition; but there is a certain group that have taken on a huge responsibility. Some architects went to the front, others changed the format of their operation to include humanitarian aid; they negotiate the necessary funds with municipalities, they organize partners and support. I am curious about how the architectural milieu in Ukraine has changed and I would like to explore this topic further.**

CO-HATY pilot project in Ivano-Frankivsk, 170 beds, adapted by Metalab
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photo Anastasja Kubert

KK: Is there room in your work for discussion about its purely architectural dimension? Are you discussing aesthetics and talking about the residents' perceptions?

AP: In the present era, when we face difficulties with the availability of materials, the aesthetics of bricolage or collage has gained in value and importance. It is definitely easier for people who have designed in this spirit before. They are not waiting for the perfect material or the perfect solution to become available; instead, they just try to do the best they can in the current situation. Despite the problems and limited resources, they feel the need to take care of aesthetics. Certainly, this is not an easy task; admittedly, our re-adaptation has disfigured many objects. At CO-HATY, we implement cheap projects, but their beauty is of great importance to us. Aesthetics carries a strong message: see, people affected or threatened with exclusion deserve beauty; these cheap humanitarian facilities, social housing, can be beautiful. We need to stop thinking that volunteers build poor-quality structures whereas good architecture is created for rich and influential clients. You won't find our designs on ArchDaily, but they are beautiful, and we manage to achieve this effect at a low cost. If we have a small budget and we follow the principle of using everything that is available and suitable for reuse, there is a high risk that the end result will not be particularly stunning. However, we can try to balance this approach: we can choose nice elements and give up those that spoil the aesthetics.

KK: What are your plans? What are you working on currently?

AP: I have been focusing on research work. I want to analyse what the architectural and activist community can learn from the CO-HATY project, and how to disseminate our methods in the architectural trade. ○

We want to continue our operations. CO-HATY is planning to adapt further buildings, and Metalab provides funds for this purpose. The mission of renovating residential buildings for internally displaced persons has not lost its importance; therefore, Metalab also organizes and supports local workshops for that purpose. They want to allocate substantial resources for the development of infrastructure, for furnishing and equipping spaces that would allow craftsmen and people of other specializations to design and produce all kinds of objects – both for CO-HATY and for their own needs. This is a very important element of the future ecosystem of radically democratic and equitable design and architectural practices. We do not know what the future of intervention projects will look like, or what the architect's role in creating and implementing intervention projects will be. I believe we need to focus on supporting grassroots practices so that they can compete on an equal footing with conventional projects. ●

Adaptation works in a former hotel in Ivano-Frankivsk, 80 beds, Metalab
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photo Anastasja Kubert

○ / ○ / **I would like to reduce the gap between conventional architecture and voluntary work. We are not volunteers. We have not a plan but a mission. We can pursue that mission in two ways: show that humanitarian projects can be beautiful (the architectural way), or show appreciation for the people involved in the process – to empower them. My mission is to help them take on the role of organizers, to make their endeavours appreciated; then, when the time of reconstruction comes, they will be in the vanguard. It goes without saying that these plans may change due to many factors.**

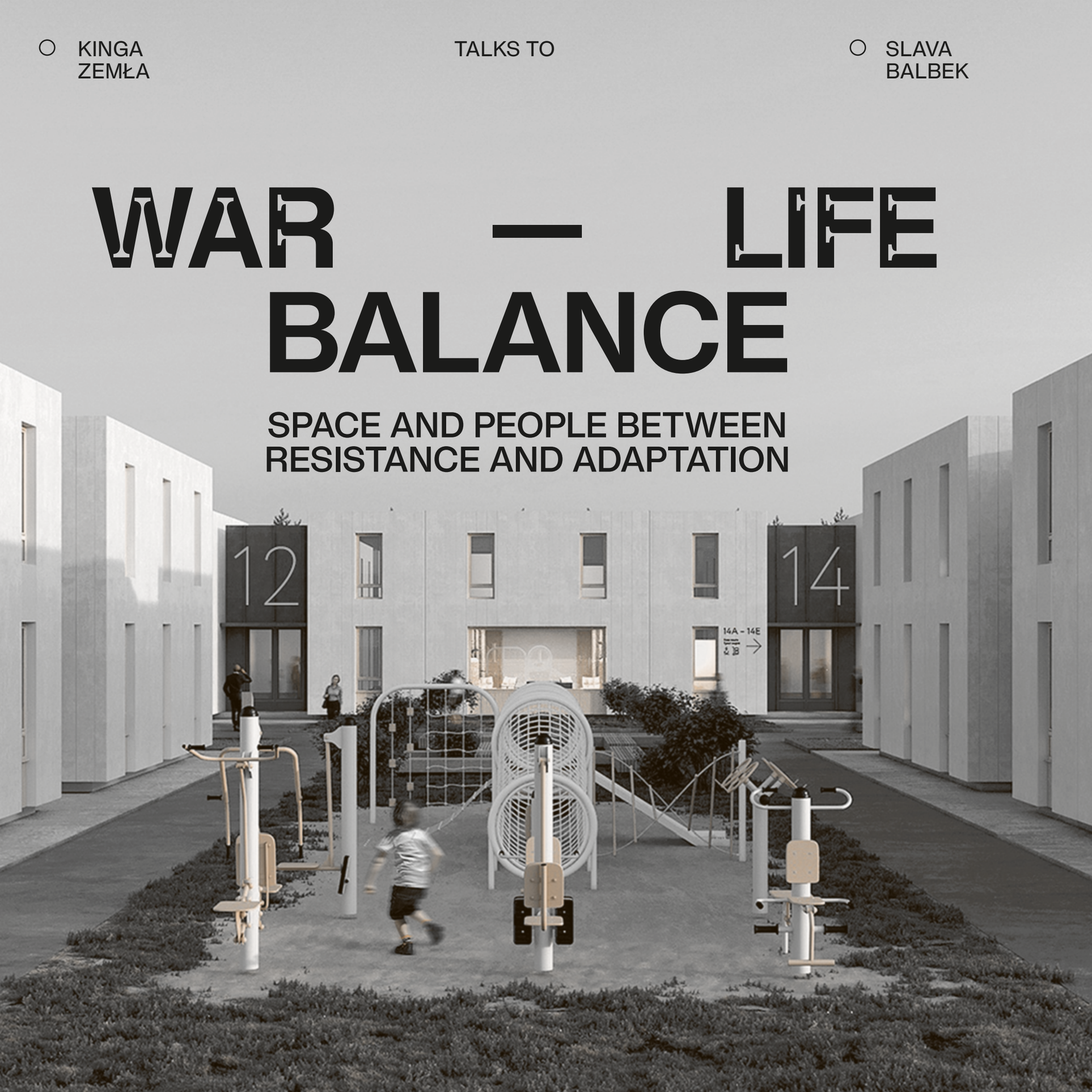
KINGA ZEMŁA

TALKS TO

SLAVA BALBEK

WAR — LIFE BALANCE

SPACE AND PEOPLE BETWEEN RESISTANCE AND ADAPTATION

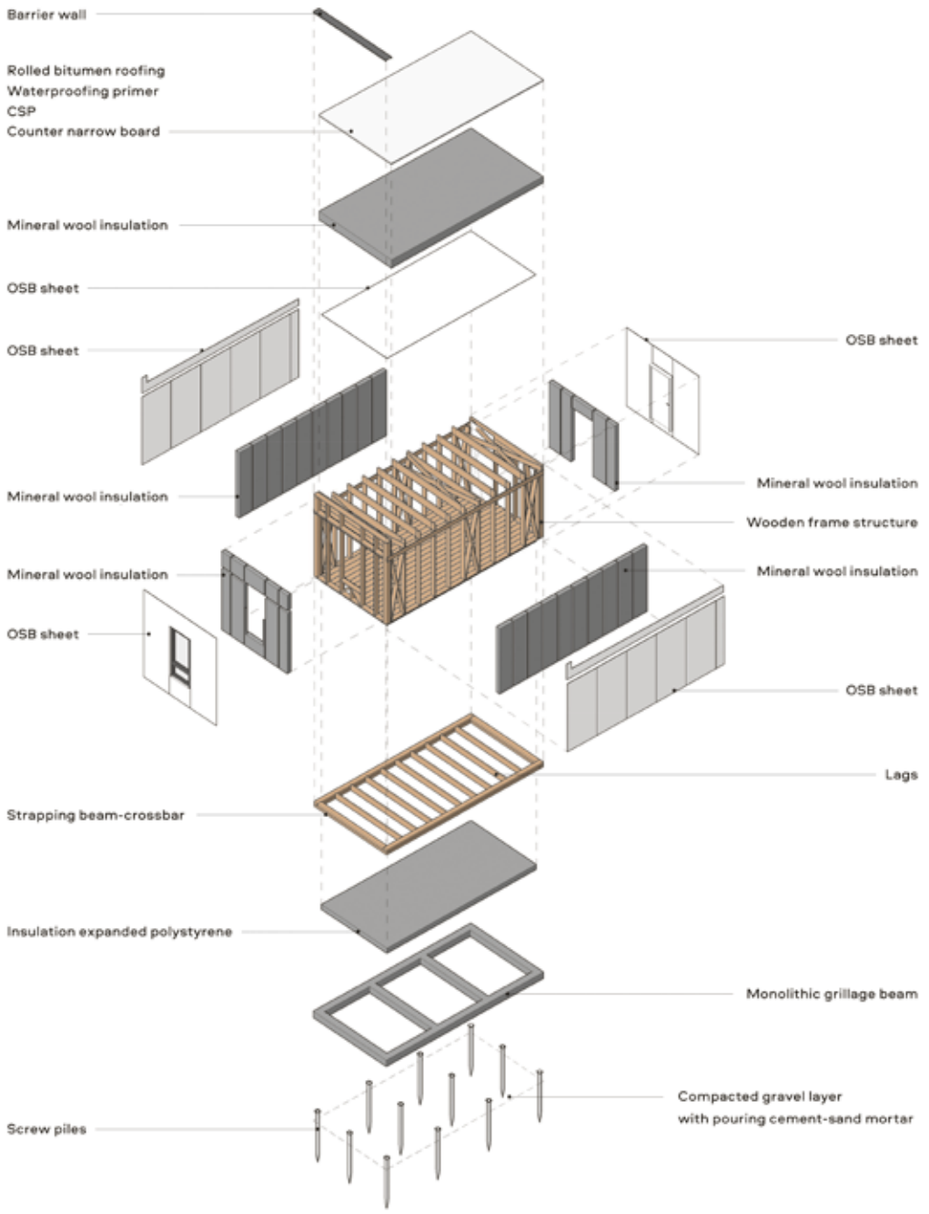


Balbek Bureau, a design studio in Kyiv, was founded fourteen years ago by Ukrainian architects Slava Balbek and Boris Dorogov. The team has created residential, commercial and office architecture; they have also designed interiors, furniture, and decorative elements. They have frequently received awards for their work. Their activities were interrupted on February 24, 2022 by brutal Russian aggression, which forced these designers to regroup and to adapt their architectural knowledge and experience to new conditions and new challenges. To begin with, their RE:Ukraine System initiative responded to the growing demand for temporary settlements that would house internally displaced persons; in the months that followed, they also addressed the issues of rebuilding destroyed villages and towns and protecting cultural assets. As part of this initiative, a platform was created to discuss the role of spatial solutions in the processes of dealing with trauma and commemoration.

KINGA ZEMŁA: In December last year, you came to Stockholm to talk about the architectural initiative called RE:Ukraine System. That is when we met. During the lecture you gave on December 1, 2022 at the Royal Swedish Academy of Arts, you talked about specific projects and solutions; at the same time, you were forced to constantly expand the context of the story: not so much to explain the spatial conditions for the creation of these projects, but primarily to include the emotions accompanying the alternating processes of resistance and adaptation. Using the rather spooky term *war-life balance*, you introduced the listeners to the changes that had taken place at Balbek Bureau and in your personal life: you are still active in the field of architecture, but you have also joined the Ukrainian army as a volunteer. It seems to me that there is no way to start this conversation other than by asking about the beginning, that is, about February 24, 2022 and the days that followed.

SLAVA BALBEK: The first days were the hardest. Ensuring your own safety and the safety of your near and dear ones had become an absolute priority. I also consider Balbek Bureau employees to be my near and dear ones. The management team sent out messages, telling them not to worry about costs or salaries and to do everything possible to protect themselves and their families. We tried to reach everyone and help as much as we could. Some decided to leave Kyiv and went to the west of the country, to Lviv; some went abroad, mostly to Poland. Others enlisted in the army and are still fighting on the frontline to this day. Unfortunately, several women, our architect colleagues, were stuck in a village that was being occupied by the aggressor on the outskirts of the capital. In short text messages, they wrote that they had lost their internet connection and were afraid to leave their homes because the streets were full of Russians. Today I am relieved to say that no one on our team was seriously hurt, but at the time we were terrified. Those of us who stayed in Kyiv became involved in providing emergency assistance on the spot. Before the war, the office had a business connection with a chain of cafés, so we decided to organize a food supply chain. For two weeks, we prepared meals and delivered them to shelters and military bases. Around mid-March, we started wondering how to incorporate our architectural knowledge and experience into activities for Ukraine.

At the same time, we understood that if the office was to survive, we had to continue working on the few projects that were not cut short by the war – foreign ones, obviously. We responded to sympathetic e-mails



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Structural scheme for homes in the RE:Ukraine Housing project; settlement for internally displaced persons
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Courtesy of Balbek Bureau

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Visualisation for the RE:Ukraine Housing project; settlement for internally displaced persons
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Courtesy of Balbek Bureau

Common spaces in the housing project were provided according to the “from standard minimum to minimum comfort” principle
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Courtesy of Balbek Bureau

from customers with a slightly forced, light-hearted tone: “everything is fine, no problem, business as usual”. But first, we needed to regroup. From the entire team, we gathered about thirty people capable of working. Not everyone was mentally ready for this, but those who decided that they were simply felt the need to do something.

KZ: So acting has become a form of releasing or blocking out emotions? Anger, despair, helplessness?

SB: Absolutely. We published the first version of the RE:Ukraine Housing project in just ten days – can you imagine? We worked like crazy, practically non-stop. Sometimes I remember that period and I still can’t believe it. We really needed that. Over the last few months, I have seen different reactions and strategies in the face of the crisis. I think that people can be divided into three groups on the basis of these reactions. The first group includes those who become completely paralyzed and are unable to take any action. In the second group, I would classify people who only see a way out of the situation by escaping. The rest, the third group, cannot stand inaction: it is what crushes them, what overwhelms them the most. I do not wish to judge anyone; every person is determined by his or her own individual psychological predisposition. Thanks to our work within the RE:Ukraine System, we have been able to cope with this terrible new reality. We spent about one-fifth of our time doing foreign commercial projects, and the rest of the time we were working on the initiative.

KZ: Before we dive into the RE:Ukraine System, I want to hear about your experiences as a frontline volunteer. When did you decide to sign up? Did you have any experience with the army before the war? I am guessing that if you had ever used a drone, it was to take photos of land plots from a bird’s eye view, at most…

SB: (*laughter*) Not even that. I had been to a shooting range several times. Also, our entire team had completed a first aid course, which is highly valuable knowledge. Volunteers do not need to have military experience. They sign a contract, which is less restrictive than an official military contract and allows for considerable flexibility both in terms of the time they devote and the duties they perform. ○

○ / ○ / You can help in many ways, starting from the distribution of equipment, food, and medicine, or evacuating the injured. Other less obvious forms of support are also offered. For instance, many physiotherapists go to the front to give massages to soldiers. I know a guy who does tattoos there.

I signed up for a special course in drone piloting and war tactics. Only after completing it, in July, did I gain the right to take part in military missions. It didn’t last long, because two months later the rules changed and I would need to get an additional certificate to continue. Because I was trying to strike a balance between RE:Ukraine System and emergency assistance in the occupied territories, I did not give up volunteering, but I mainly acted as a driver. Being in a war zone, close to the front lines, became part of my life. I try to go once a month, for about a week each time. I hope this doesn’t sound weird, but I’ve found that I am no longer able to stay put in Kyiv for long. It is as if I need that adrenaline shot, need to expose myself to risk, otherwise I would fall into stagnation and lose my focus. Now I know this about myself.

KZ: On the one hand, you are regularly involved in the war zone; on the other hand, you are developing RE:Ukraine System. Is it fair to say that this initiative grew out of the need not only to act and cope with the situation, but also to resist?

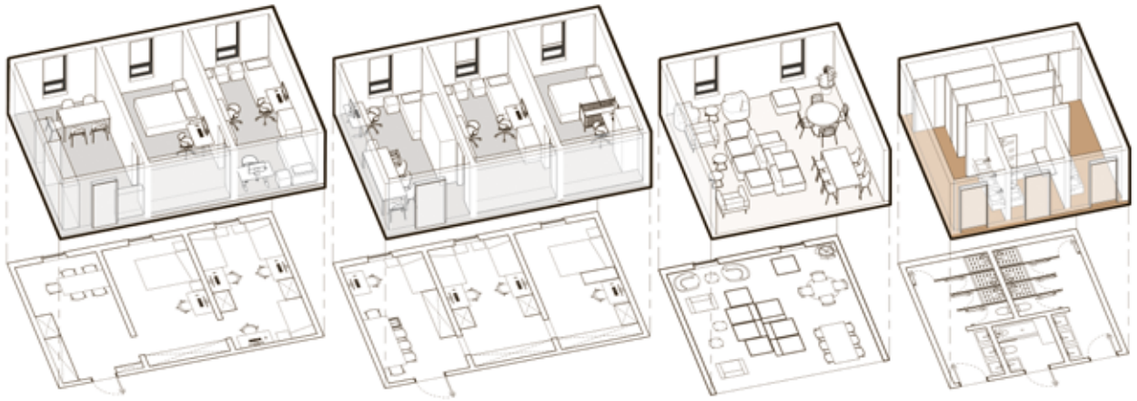
SB: It grew directly out of our experiences. We had to abandon our apartments, move from place to place, hide in shelters. To varying degrees, we also became refugees. At the same time, all these transitions had a spatial dimension and were an obvious architectural theme. RE:Ukraine System brings together several different projects, each of which has a specific position in the hierarchy of needs. Despite the structure being clear from today’s point of view, the initiative has developed gradually, consisting of organic reactions to the subsequent stages of the war. Like a mirror, it reflects the evolution of our experiences, emotions, and thoughts.

I have mentioned the indisputable priority of physical security. For people whose homes have been destroyed or who have had to flee from the occupied territories, it is of utmost importance to find a temporary place to stay. That is why RE:Ukraine System started with a project of settlements for internally displaced persons; we called it RE:Ukraine Housing. Only when this basic need is met can we move beyond the individual perspective towards a community, for example a neighbourhood community. In the face of a shared fate, mutual support arises immediately and often manifests itself in completely prosaic, mundane activities, such as repairing damaged fences. It is to the community, composed of individual citizens, neighbours, and local authorities, that we dedicated RE:Ukraine Villages. It is a catalogue of country houses and an online tool: a set of architectural and construction tips and directions, useful whenever reconstruction is necessary. Collaboration to restore a state of quasi-normality to private space gives rise to concern for the more broadly understood surroundings, for example, infrastructure,

cultural and educational centres, symbolic places and objects. In this spirit, the RE:Ukraine Monuments was created: a monument protection system. The RE:Ukraine Memories and RE:Ukraine Visions projects tackle space – they transform it into a tool for building collective memory and processing trauma. I wish to emphasize once again that although the various branches of RE:Ukraine System now form a narrative whole, in March last year we were working in a mode of pure chaos. We diagnosed the first fundamental need – providing decent conditions for temporary accommodation – and started dealing with that.

KZ: All your projects operate within the spectrum of temporariness. In Stockholm, you emphasized that they belong to this dimension of life. You have decided not to deal with either long-term solutions or – at the other end of the spectrum – with emergency solutions.

SB: There are simple reasons behind this decision. The government is already operating in emergency mode. It focuses primarily on rebuilding critical infrastructure and organizing makeshift settlements made of containers. Moreover, in a situation of sudden crisis – for example, the need to swiftly escape – emergency solutions suggest themselves due to the lack of alternatives. You go to live with friends or relatives or in a hastily constructed camp. While these places work well as immediate remedies, in most cases they are not suitable for long-term stays. ○



RE: Ukraine Housing was designed as a modular system
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Courtesy of Balbek Bureau

○ / ○ / **The problem is that this unstable situation could persist for years, and with it, life in precarious conditions can also persist. People condemned to living in a container home or on a sofa in someone's living room are waiting to return to "normal"; they are waiting to rebuild their house or village. This perspective remains distant and is based on a long-term vision that assumes a successful conclusion to the war. RE:Ukraine Housing is a response to this temporary circumstance; it is intended to provide decent living conditions in the period in between.**

We propose a strategy that is both parallel and complementary to emergency solutions and long-term projects. We are happy that government representatives noticed this, and we were invited to several meetings at the ministries of culture and infrastructure. We hope to establish partnership-based collaboration with the authorities. Regardless of whether this happens or not, all projects within the RE:Ukraine System are available, free of charge, to anyone who would like to make use of them, whether it is at the level of private entities, local communities, or public authorities.

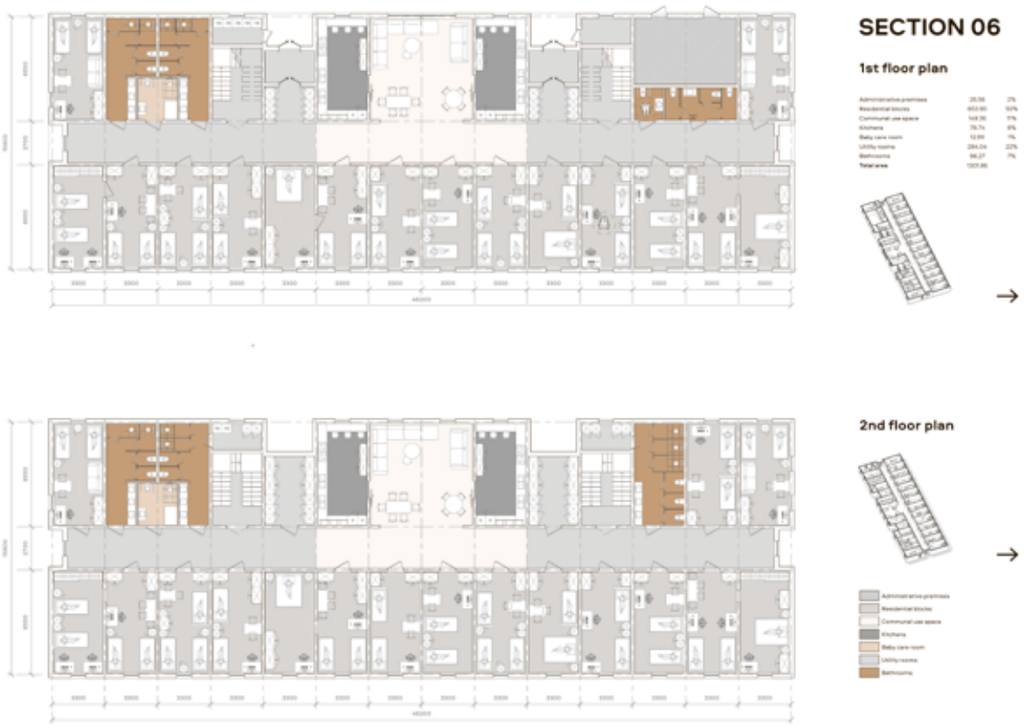
KZ: You put emphasis on the fact that most refugees do not wish to be resettled far away from the places where they used to live before the war. You also point out that temporary settlements should be established close to cities, preferably connected to their urban systems. How does one implement these demands in practice? How is the process of acquiring plots going, and what does the cooperation with local governments look like? The pilot project is being put into operation in the Vorzel urban estate in the Bucha region.

SB: In January, after completing all the formalities, construction finally began. The development is being built on plots belonging to the local municipality, with money raised from a collection. According to the agreement we concluded with the authorities in Bucha, for one year from the date of settlement this place will be supervised by a group of architects from our office. They will be delegated there to conduct analyses and deepen our knowledge of the residents' needs. Later on, management will be taken over by the local government. Unfortunately, because the area belongs to the municipality, the preparation and approval of the required documentation took almost five months! RE:Ukraine Housing is a modular system, so according to the plan, construction should have been completed within three months. Of course, in war conditions it is difficult to make any predictions. Shelling or power outages might render the task more difficult, and it will likely take longer to complete. This makes the overly extensive bureaucratic procedure all the more absurd. However, we decided to go through all its stages carefully and fastidiously in order to collect constructive comments and suggestions for improvements and then pass them on to government representatives. To strengthen our argument, we will also refer to the experience of the second pilot project in Lutsk. We are implementing it on the initiative of a group of private investors, under their supervision and at their

expense. That camp is being built very fast.

KZ: You expressed the goal of the transitional architecture of the RE:Ukraine Housing modular system with a concise slogan: from standard minimum to minimum comfort. What do you consider to be the minimal comfort in a refugee settlement, especially considering that a temporary condition tends to slide into the state of undesirable permanence?

SB: First of all, we care about introducing some normality to the refugee experience through a space that ensures privacy and freedom at the same time. Both of these dimensions of living are missing in a container home or on a couch in someone else's living room. At the level of the urban plan and in individual buildings alike, we have made provisions for common spaces where residents can nurture bonds and relationships with each other or entertain guests. Moreover, our understanding of minimum comfort comes down to basic dimensions, for example the width of the corridor: it should afford comfortable passage in a wheelchair and not cause claustrophobia. ○



○ / Sometimes a dozen or several dozen additional centimetres are enough to raise the standard if they significantly influence the perception of the space by its users. We need to remember that we are shaping a living environment for people in dire circumstances, burdened with the trauma of war. We would like this environment to act as a neutral setting for mental recovery, not a source of further suffering or anxiety. Camp residents need to regain strength to cope with the reality of war. They will not regain their strength in a space that is yet another burden for them.

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The modular system facilitates various configurations within individual buildings
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Courtesy of Balbek Bureau

KZ: During the lecture, you emphasized the connection between aesthetics and decent living conditions. Of course, today you do not design expensive, sophisticated interiors or façades, but you still include aesthetics in your ideological programs, although they are not a practical dimension of shelter architecture. I assume that aesthetics' role and impact on the user's mental condition depends on individual adaptation and habits. Some will be sensitive to its absence; others will hardly notice.

SB: You perceived that we propose the aesthetics of cheap and simple solutions. Nevertheless, we treat those seriously – as carriers of normality in an abnormal situation. We wish to create a space conducive to the regeneration of people who carry within them images of destruction and obliteration. What is more, although we design places for temporary living, we do not consider these settlements to be temporary architecture that is intended for demolition on the day the war ends. Houses built in a modular system, with a wooden structure, are durable and can last for many years. We imagine that after the war these housing estates will be transformed into offices or educational complexes. Being mindful of the building's life cycle, we do not want to give up the aesthetic layer.

KZ: When you put it this way, I also think about the more personal dimension of practicing the profession of architect. It seems that, regardless of the circumstances, you wish to work in a way that is as close as possible to the one you knew before the war, without giving up the values that always guided you. Russian aggression has already forced you to design refugee camps instead of ordinary settlements. I sense a form of resistance on an individual level.

SB: I fully agree with this interpretation. In an architect's work, the search for beauty is associated with artistic expression, even if we do not typically devote a significant portion of time and work on every project to beauty. During a war, a painter will still create paintings and a poet will still write poems, although the creative process is interrupted by the sounds of sirens and the necessity to evacuate before the next air raid. We are going through different stages of this war. We transform our experiences and emotions into new projects that are created in response to the changing reality. In hindsight, we will probably see and recognize subsequent stages in our works: the occupation of Kherson, of Kharkiv Oblast, the tragedy

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Spatial layout envisages meeting places, small squares or plazas
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Courtesy of Balbek Bureau

in Dnipro, and so forth. I sincerely hope that you never come to experience anything like this.

KZ: It is hard for me to imagine working in an office in such conditions.

SB: Indeed, it is not easy, but we have developed operating patterns. People are surprisingly adaptable; they adjust really quickly even to the worst conditions imaginable. Last November, I noticed that some people on the team – as well as some of the volunteers who were helping us – were falling into a stagnation of prolonged fatigue and devastation. I suggested that we prepare projects for several foreign competitions in order to break away from what was happening around us and give ourselves some time to do something enjoyable, something that would make us happy. The deadline for submitting proposals was at the end of the month, and that is when regular power outages began. ○

○ / ○ / We did not want to give up; in a way, the inaction caused by the blackouts depressed us even more; it deepened the feeling of helplessness. We drew a lot of sketches by hand, but we needed computers. We had to set up a minivan with a power generator; we parked it near the office. We started the engine, turned on the generator, and plugged an extension cord through the window. Some people worked in their cars. All my friends already have their own power generators; they have learned how to jump-start them, to change the oil, to switch to diesel. Before, they had not the faintest idea how to use these things.

In order not to go crazy, we endeavoured to approach everyday life with humour, in a relaxed way, like a twisted game. Of course, we knew that the alarms heralded real danger. Those motherfuckers were trying to hit critical infrastructure, and suddenly seventy missiles were falling on Kyiv. Usually in such situations the electricity was turned off first. The alarms were howling, you would be waiting for an explosion, missiles were striking; the noise was terrifying. And then, well… we would go to the minivan and try to keep working.

KZ: (silence) Since we are talking about the shelling, let us talk about RE:Ukraine Monuments. You designed a simple protective structure for monuments, more solid and aesthetic than traditional mountains of sandbags. As an aesthetic solution, this project seems to be part of the process of adapting space to the new normal. The story of its pilot implementation disarms me. After installation, the structure survived for several months before it was significantly damaged during the shelling of the city. The monument was not damaged, which proves the structure's efficacy. You immediately raised the steel frame again and attached the panels. What admirable tenacity. Doesn't helplessness creep in, though, when you see the fruits of your labour literally blown up?

SB: What drives me is not so much tenacity but faith in statistics (laughter). The probability of another explosion in the same location is low, especially if there are no objects of military importance in the area. The monument is located near a park and a kindergarten. You mentioned the new normal. Restoring normality – to any extent – is crucial for mental health, and the "normal" includes places that are

an integral part of everyday life. A few hours after the explosion, residents are always seen cleaning the streets, repairing windows, and pouring asphalt. Living in an atmosphere of destruction is extremely emotionally taxing.

Functioning in the condition of temporariness has transformed the perspective of perceiving the effects of one's own work, and this applies not only to RE: Ukraine Monuments. ○

○ / ○ / **The lens through which we assessed our performance before the war shifted to a focus on achieving goals in small steps. We consider each of our undertakings valuable if it benefits at least one person, even for a short time: if it arouses hope, gives strength or comfort to someone. Supporting Ukrainian society is our form of resistance. It is the soldiers who fight at the front – but we are also operating in defensive and striking mode. In the war-time mode, we do not expect architecture to last, so we cannot give up just because what we built has turned to dust.**

KZ: In RE:Ukraine Memories you adopted the opposite tactics: instead of repairing and restoring normality, you preserved – in destroyed form – a bridge blown up by the Ukrainian army at the beginning of the war. The famous bridge in Irpin became a symbol of not just resistance but also of the tragedy of thousands of people evacuated from under its collapsed body during Russian shelling. The concept is to perpetuate the memory of these events in an extremely meaningful way. You reached for the memory of an open wound.

SB: For me, this is the most difficult, most painful of all projects. Our proposal sparked a heated discussion. Some recipients welcomed it, but people from Irpin hated it. They do not want to keep the destroyed bridge or see it in this condition because they live in destroyed houses, in destroyed villages, in a destroyed region. We understand their pain perfectly, but we are trying to look beyond its horizon to the times when everything will have been recovered and rebuilt. Today, every place is marked by the stigma of war – the damaged buildings, villages, and cities are a constant reminder of it and bring the war to the fore. In a few years or a decade or so, these traces will disappear. Perhaps it would be a clear testimony – not only of suffering, but also of the courage and dignity with which we faced this aggression – to preserve the bridge in its present condition, an indelible mark on the landscape. We also see it as a way to stimulate the debate, which we believe should start now rather than later. In the future, we will lose some of our experiences and reflections, and the range of concepts for describing them will narrow significantly. By postponing this conversation until peacetime, we risk false notes creeping into it. We need to start working through all this right away. Together.

KZ: Self-organization and grassroots community-binding action seem to be at the basis of your ideas about the reconstruction of Ukraine. You mentioned that the government currently has other problems than focusing on the comprehensive reconstruction of destroyed villages but that the reconstruction is happening nevertheless – carried out by inhabitants with the help of volunteers and architects. In the RE:Ukraine Villages virtual catalogue, you propose original typologies from various regions of Ukraine, a traditional colour palette, vernacular details and materials. On the one hand, you care about maintaining architectural heritage, but you entrust this task to local communities. Anyone can download a PDF from your catalogue with a ready-made, dimensioned project and instructions for its implementation. Do you consider self-reconstruction to be a pillar of the country's spatial renewal after the end of the war?

SB: Yes, but I have to make one correction. ○

○ / ○ / **We are not waiting for the unspecified, long-awaited day of the end of the war to begin large-scale reconstruction. It is just happening already. Step by step, region by region, with or without our participation, in all liberated areas, people are gathering up their strength, mobilizing, and trying to rebuild their houses, villages, and towns.**

Nobody wants to be displaced; everyone prefers to stay in their hometown or region, with their family, friends and neighbours, even in towns less than thirty kilometres away from the front line. At the beginning of January this year, I was in the area of Kharkiv, which was completely destroyed. Humanitarian aid had already arrived: food, warm clothes and power generators had been delivered.

Protective system for monuments by RE:Ukraine Monuments
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Courtesy of Balbek Bureau

I talked to the women, inhabitants of the local villages, and they kept repeating: “Slava, we have been provided with all the basic products to survive the winter. Now we need construction materials so that we can rebuild our houses and villages!” It makes no sense to wait. RE:Ukraine Villages is suitable for both individual use and local government activities. We have developed this catalogue not because we believe in human agency; we just keep witnessing it, all the time. There is incredible potential and energy in the strength of the community.

KZ: One of your newest ideas is RE:Ukraine Visions. You propose developing a virtual tool that, based on an image of destruction – a destroyed house, street, or square – would generate a simple visualization of the future, after reconstruction. You call this the architecture of solace. For me, it brings to mind Jonathan Lear’s “radical hope”, but not so much because of the hope it offers (it has little in common with the term coined by the philosopher), but because of its emphasis on the role of the imaginative process in overcoming life’s difficulties. Lear stresses that in radical circumstances, when known and familiar concepts are not sufficient to describe the situation, new ones must be created to face that. If we use our imagination, it becomes easier. Imaginary pictures or visions can be transformed into new meanings. Individuals often replace the community in doing so: poets, priests, or leaders. Compared to other RE:Ukraine projects, this system seems the least practical, but you decided to include it in the mainstream solutions needed in the temporary situation. What experiences led to its creation?

SB: In order to be able to do something, you first have to imagine it. You are an architect, so you understand this mechanism perfectly. During your studies and later professional practice, you exercised your spatial imagination. The tools that you developed during this time are useful not only for visualizing space. You know that the better you visualize your goal, the easier it will be for you to plan your way towards it. Not everyone can do this. Some people look at destruction and they see only destruction: they cannot go beyond it, free themselves from it, or believe that something can happen after it. Simple graphics generated by RE:Ukraine Visions are intended to help you visualize your dream and thus awaken the desire to make it come true. It will also work as a practical carrier of ideas. For example, someone wants to build a new school on the ruins of the old one. RE:Ukraine Visions will generate five different visualizations. You can show these to other people, try to convince them to accept the idea; you can discuss the details, raise funds for reconstruction… We will offer light at the end of the tunnel, powered by artificial intelligence; the work is still in progress. Similarly to RE:Ukraine Villages, the team of architects began by analysing typologies, architectural styles, uses and functions, and other components. After feeding the algorithm with this knowledge, the mechanism will read the location and photos from before the war and add layers to the image of the destroyed surroundings. The user will upload a photo and complete twelve steps in the application, which will then present several scenarios of what this place could look like in the future.

KZ: How does your team imagine the future, hopefully post-war and victorious, although probably full of challenges?

SB: In the long term, it will be important to create and refine local master plans and change the construction laws. We are hoping to take part in this. Although RE:Ukraine System emerged from the reality of war, it will remain with us for many years to come, after the victory. We see it as an initiative incorporated into comprehensive social processes rather than as a project that is committed, implemented – and completed, finished. Part of our team will continue to supervise its development. That is the plan, although funding obviously remains a challenge. It is easy to raise ten thousand dollars online for a drone that will most likely crash after a few days, but architectural initiatives are not as popular. However, we believe that we will be able to continue. We are getting support from abroad, also from Poland. I don’t think anyone anywhere supports us as much as Poles do, on various levels. I wish to thank you very much for this, and also for today’s conversation and the opportunity to talk about RE:Ukraine System.

KZ: Poles actually understand that although you are fighting this war alone – albeit with the support of the West, but essentially alone – this is not just your war. We also owe Ukrainians our gratitude. I wish you a lot of strength, Slava, and I hope that we will meet again soon, perhaps in a free Ukraine. ●

BORYS
FILONENKO

Bulletproof vest made of spider’s web

How the artists of Ukraine found their bearings in the war and in other spaces

“Ukrainians are excellent at self-organization, but self-government is beyond them in many respects”, artist Leo Trotsenko believes. The character of this nation is recorded even in folk proverbs: “Where there are two Ukrainians, there are three hetmans”, or “All Cossacks are atamans”. This may be the reason for the difficulties in negotiating a state administration and institutions that are stable. “We have nothing to lose except for our Maidans” was the title of the fifth issue of “Krytyka Polityczna” from 2016. This paradoxical (in)ability to cooperate significantly defined the Ukrainian resistance to the Russian aggression in the phase of full-scale war in 2022. This crisis’s consequences and things that had previously been seen as potential obstacles to growth now suddenly manifested as collective actions to save the common space. They also forced a re-evaluation of all previous considerations about living together.

In the first days following February 24, countless civic initiatives were launched all over Ukraine: from foundations established by people enjoying public trust, to mobile humanitarian aid units. Artists Vitaly Kochan and Oleh Kalashnyk, while typically not very quick to act in times of peace, now managed the delivery of basic necessities to hard-to-reach districts of Kharkiv, and they did so under chaotic artillery fire. In Lviv, the self-organized Kukhnya initiative cooked for internally displaced persons who filled the square outside the railway station. Later, this initiative expanded and ran four shelters for displaced persons. Seven days a week, Kukhnya fed about 120 people each day, mostly with vegetarian meals of the “*damn good food*” category. The team of the Assortmenta kimnata contemporary art gallery in Ivano-Frankivsk became involved in the evacuation of works of art from endangered territories; moreover, on the initiative of the artist and curator Lesya Chomenko, they also organized a residency for artists who remained in the country. The works and reflections created during that residency travelled around Europe as a possible form of artistic diplomacy during the war.

These initiatives are unique, but they repeat certain patterns of interaction. The scale of activities ranges from one car and one airdrop to tens of thousands of volunteers who, to this day, are constantly moving between markets and pharmacies, villages and large cities, zones of relative peace and zones of combat. In the relatively short period of thirty years since regaining independence, self-organization in Ukraine has reached a peak of mutual trust. Until recently, this scenario did not seem obvious at all.

I shall write about artists whom the invasion surprised in Kharkiv, Kyiv, or Lviv. They had to abandon all their existing artistic practices and develop new ones that were appropriate to the circumstances of the war. Online diaries have become a popular genre. They fulfil the need to preserve memories and emotions and to understand from the inside what is happening – how things that until recently had been certain or, on the contrary, impossible suddenly switched places. I will also try to capture in words the events that happened a year ago – so, still not distant. They still concern us, and meanwhile they have made us new people several times over. This is the right moment to look at previous versions of oneself – from a distance, but not too far removed.

Underground city square. Mykola Kolomiyets and Aza Nizi Maza art studio

Full-blown war gave an unpredictable shape to ideas and made dreams come true. The artist Vasyl Hrublak had been interested in the problem of light pollution in large cities, especially in Kyiv, for many years. Attacks on critical infrastructure in the autumn and winter at the turn of 2023 clearly showed what life looks like with less energy consumption – and that there are many ways to survive. Blackout has become the flip side of conscious energy consumption. The artist Nikita Kadan works with the themes of memory and cultural ruins. In 2021, he talked about a nightmare he had about a post-apocalyptic world. In that dream, Kadan didn’t experience Armageddon, he just dealt with its aftermath. At the end of February 2022, he found himself at the epicentre of the collapse of the current reality. For the first few weeks, he reported his slow movement through besieged Kyiv on Instagram. In his youth, Mykola Kolomiyets did a student internship in Feodosia, where he painted murals in churches. In a nightmarish dream, the abbot praised his work but suggested that there was one more task to be done: frescoing the walls in the huge catacombs, which resembled a giant subway station. In March 2022, when Russian troops were trying to capture Kharkiv, Kolomiyets actually set up a temporary art studio at the Historical Museum metro station.

Aza Nizi Maza art studio, primarily known in Ukraine for its work with children and youth, was established in Kharkiv in 2012. The founders set up their studios in the basements of tenement houses on a quiet street called Pushkin’s Entrance. Given the movement against imperial toponyms, this street should now be called Some Ukrainian Poet’s Entrance. In 2016, Aza Nizi Maza moved to its own premises at Chernihiv Street, also in the basement. On the eve of the invasion, the principles of functioning – literally – underground and the convenient location made the studio a potential shelter for a larger number of people and animals. After the attack, this potential was used, and the joint artistic work moved to premises located even deeper underground.

Mykola Kolomiyets founded the studio and continues to conduct classes there. Soon after the aggression, he decided to continue working in the subway. Stations

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Art workshops by Aza Nizi Maza studio in the Historical Museum metro station in Kharkiv
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photo: Mykola Kolomiyets

were turned into shelters for residents. Common, private and semi-private spaces were arranged on the platforms and in the carriages; children and teenagers also lived there or spent the night. Nothing comes easy in Kharkiv, but that has changed in the new situation. Mykola shared several observations with me.

> "Everyone was stunned at some point and, strangely enough, the situation brought out the best in people. What I appreciated most was that no one disturbed the work, which is something unusual here. On the contrary, we got many offers of help. All subway stations were stocked with the necessities – there were too many of them. We were offered paints and asked about what children would wish for. I especially remember the rare opportunity to do something my way, without prohibitions or obstacles".

The decor of the History Museum metro station – in ordinary times completely plastered with advertisements for the Ukrainian electronics market – changed dramatically over the course of a few weeks. Almost all of Aza Nizi Maza's new students were recruited from among the people who found shelter at this station. In the most difficult time, on columns covered with white marble, they worked on a series of large-format paintings on paper. When this metro line began to function normally again, the works were not removed; instead, they remained as the main visual element of the space.

Kolomiyets says that the History Museum was a "party" station, a kind of municipal square, albeit not too crowded. Mostly families with children and elderly people lived there. In the context of Kharkiv, he calls the first six months of the invasion "a celebration of tenderness" as members of the local underground community constantly showed this tenderness to each other. All sorts of people came here, from the mayor of the city, Ihor Terekhov, to the homeless. A hairdressing salon was started, then a smoking room; children rode bicycles, and dogs were walked to a separate wing. The lights in the stations were dimmed, but they were turned back on at full power during art classes. Kolomiyets recalls how he felt at that time: he saw strangers in the street and wanted to hug them.

An adrenaline rush and living in the shadow of death. Katia Libkind

The last exhibition I visited before the invasion was *Ce ne moje / Bil* (It's not mine / Pain) by Stanislav Turina and Valentyn Radchenko at The Naked Room gallery in Kyiv.

Several dozen paintings, drawings and objects, as well as poetic texts and descriptions were presented. At the opening, the curator and artist Katia Libkind said: "When I look at all these works, I think about how much I have to lose". Valentyn Radchenko is a colleague of Katia and Stas in atelienormalno – a community and studio of artists, some with and some without Down syndrome, established in 2018 in Kyiv. One of his creative methods involves directly tracing along the edges of objects on paper. Each object is related to the artist's personal history: people, non-human beings, and events that are revealed through the author's commentary on this or that object/outline. Turina presented graphics and ceramic objects from the series *Neskinchennyj natiurmort* (Endless Still Life), which had been created over a period of eleven years and enabled its creator to continually learn drawing in dialogue with other artists. Gathering, collecting, creating archives and anthologies,

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Artworks in Pavlivka hospital in Kyiv, painted by students and residents of the psychiatric unit in Pushcha-Vodytsya
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photo: Katia Libkind

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Works by Valentyn Radchenko at the *Ce ne moje / Bil* (It's not mine / Pain) exhibition at The Naked Room gallery in Kyiv
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photo: Katia Libkind

the material world testifying to relations with people – all these long-term practices were threatened with extinction, and actual extinction was as real as possible on the day the exhibition opened. It was not looming in the sphere of suspicion or in the analysis of geopolitics experts. We were receiving various, increasingly strong material signs of it coming. This lasted from the annexation of Crimea until the fall of 2021, when the presence of 150,000 Russian troops on the Ukrainian border physically overwhelmed everyone on this side of the demarcation line.

In a conversation with Katia, a year after the invasion, I ask her about living in the shadow of death. In 2021, in an interview for the exhibition *Korysni kopalyny* (Minerals/mineral components), she talked about attending funerals and observing a kind of vitality she witnessed during them: "When people gather around death, everything becomes very much alive". With the outbreak of war, anger and empathy joined the experience of death as consequences of the great injustice caused by the invasion. In the first weeks, social networks swarmed with videos showing corpses in various forms. Katia describes this as a "kittens and corpses" mode, where mutual aid and expedited care alternated with "rituals of closely examining body pieces". She points out the links between death and solidarity:

> "Watching these videos carefully, in bulk, seemed like a way to accept your own death. These could have been the remains of our own bodies, after all".

On March 13, 2022, the Russian army fired missiles at a psychoneurological sanatorium in Pushcha-Vodytsya. The patients and staff of the facility were evacuated to Pavlivka, i.e., to Kyiv Municipal Psychiatric Hospital No. 1, named after Ivan Pavlov. The hospital issued a public request for volunteer help. Libkind and Turina became involved in helping at the facility, operating in extreme conditions. Due to the overloaded wards, there were one hundred and fifty people in one corridor requiring assistance with moving, feeding, and hygiene procedures. It was also necessary to organize places for them to relax and do various activities. Katia set up her first studio in an old hospital canteen equipped with a public toilet. After the liberation of the Kyiv region, the painting sessions moved to the sanatorium in Pushcha-Vodytsya. Katia still works there. When asked about her approach to participants and methods of conducting workshops, she answers:

> "We brought materials, paints, and we started classes. What is important to me is the atmosphere in which I can ask questions and have a direct, relaxed conversation. I don't force you to draw something beautiful, I don't correct anyone during my work. I only communicate and service the process".

In August 2022, Katia Libkind was a participant in a residency dedicated to the topic of the future. The event was organized by Assortmenta kimnata in the village of Babyn in the Ivano-Frankivsk region. High in the Carpathians, off the beaten track, the residents, including myself, had a peaceful space to reflect and to share experiences. We talked about the future as a paradox because suddenly we all found ourselves waiting to see what would happen next. When making plans, we often say: "after the victory". Katia Libkind made it transparent to us that the future in Ukraine has never been clearly defined:

> "Everything in this country happens according to the 'here and now' principle. We build a district quickly, without thinking; we don't consider the consequences. However, when a missile is flying at you, with such a worldview you are ready to resist in an instant because you are not afraid of destruction. A system that allows you to transfer money quickly without paying tax has allowed us to create a powerful volunteer movement".

We remained fatalists, but we are no longer driven by adrenaline and our self-organization has weakened. Surrounded by death and a multitude of other real threats, we experienced life intensely. This is one of the reasons why we are afraid of the "after victory" future.

"I hate Russia also because it was the reason we had to ask the European Union for significant help in many areas. There is a risk that we will lose the qualities that made us resist", Katia concluded.

A gigantic field of self-organization. Stanislav Turina

In March 2022, in EU countries and in the United States, I was often asked to theorize about the actions of Ukrainians. At the time, these requests seemed abstract to me for many reasons, including the impossibility of distancing myself. We practiced mutual aid and resistance; we talked about personal and collective experiences; we wanted to break the stereotypes about Ukraine that Russia transmitted to the rest of the world. A year later, the conditions were finally in place for an active look back, and we saw connections between pre-war practices and the events of 2022. Also in March 2022, the artist Stanislav Turina again reached for his "Z dnyem" (On the Day)[1] and "Diakuju" (Thank you!)

works – a series of cards he made in 2014 after his stay in a psychiatric hospital. In these works, he traced the links between the significant change in his personal life versus the events of the Euromaidan and then the full-blown war. In "On the Day" he considers every day as a celebration of life, whereas "Thank you!" became popular as information – or rather as an addendum to information – about help provided on one's own initiative. Soon after the invasion, social media filled with photographs of receipts from stores: the authors of these posts showed that they had done shopping for those in need. Stas shared the "Diakuyu!" cycle for all those who wanted to attach postcards to their evidence of work done – individually or in teams.

> "Ukraine has an impressive history of self-organization. I don't think this story is unique as such, but it has become so thanks to unique challenges", says Stas.

He emphasizes that art collectives contributed to that history of self-organization, but their contribution has still not been appreciated:

> "They operate locally. Galleries in apartments, inaccessible to the general public [...] We do not know about everyone. Not all of them have made themselves known".

Stas's involvement in self-organization resulted in the creation in 2018 of atelienormalno – a community and workshop for artists, including those with Down syndrome.

> "There were three people interested. They were soon followed by three more who said they would like to join. We tried. The more we did, the more interesting it became. We started with Katya Libkind and Valery Tarasenko. I initiated it because I discovered interesting artists with Down syndrome who experienced hardships in terms of their living circumstances. There was a high probability that no one would help them if we did not. In the psychiatric hospital, I learned to take care of myself and others, and to communicate with people".

Analysis of the history of self-organization in Ukraine would show differences in the attitude of society in 2022 versus the spring of 2023. Turina stresses that the type of interaction in 2022 was determined by a new factor: trust between the authorities and self-organizing grassroots initiatives. Direct relations were established: state institutions acted in synergy with volunteers, civilians with the military. The opposition temporarily

disappeared. Previously, grassroots movements had emerged to oppose weak, inaccessible, and unreliable state institutions. Turina offers a vision:

> "Imagine a huge root system or a spider's web. Various branching organizations are like a tree: at some point everything becomes covered with a cobweb, connections are made between all points. Apparently, some armies in some countries are equipped with bulletproof vests made of spider's web. Apparently, spider's web is an antiseptic, thanks to which a tree turns into a strong structure, as if made of steel. This is more or less what happened, I think".

New skills and more complicated tasks appeared: people began to work with various funds, international cooperation became closer; someone received a Nobel Prize. In 2023, these self-organized initiatives again face many obstacles. Stas draws attention primarily to the lack of personnel, education, and funds:

> "We are at a new zero point. Again, there is a sense of being in opposition and atomization. In today's conditions, these are our challenges".

Turina recalls a conversation with theatre director Pavel Yurov. It was about the long – really long – road that people involved in self-organization had travelled. On this journey, they passed through successive stages: not everyone participated in the Orange Revolution of 2004, but, for example, they invited friends who did participate to stay the night, or they shared food with them; in 2013, they joined the Euromaidan protests and fought for their values and social justice; in 2022, they realized that they could enlist in the army or support a chosen common cause to find their own place where they would work for the common good.

> "In 2004 and 2013, declarations were made. The rules and guidelines, the goals of the young generation grew out of them", Stas summed up.

To reclaim war-torn territories. Yaroslav Futymsky

Coffee shops say something about the third stage of self-organization. In May 2022, I met the artist Yaroslav Futymsky in the "Kasztan" (Chestnut) café in Kyiv. As I waited for my coffee from the drip coffee machine and a nut-shaped cookie, Yaroslav told me about his current state of well-being and the work he is involved in every week. He is active in a self-organized team dealing with the reconstruction of Chernihiv Oblast – private houses in villages and towns destroyed during the Russian offensive in February. After the withdrawal of the occupying troops, the team was supported by the locals, and the group associated around the "Kasztan" and "Lipa" (Linden) cafés gradually began to combine cuisine with

construction. Initially, volunteers delivered food and prepared meals; later, they began to look for money to buy building materials and renovate damaged houses. Soon we meet again – Yaroslav is preparing hummus and falafels in "Lipa" to collect donations for the next trip.

This self-organized initiative does not have a name and it is difficult to specify its composition.

> "Completely different people from different backgrounds came together, but they were more or less the same age, thirty plus", Yaroslav explains. "The common denominator is subcultural movements or sports: skateboarding, rollerblading. Some of them worked in cooperatives for a long time. They have varied activist experiences, but during the war they translated them into direct action. They each face war in their own way. They develop non-military strategies. Although talking about non-war during war has nothing to do with everyday reality, I am now deeply convinced that there is utopian potential in it. This utopia is directly related to construction.

In 2022, Varvara Lushchik published a report on Futymsky's group's achievements on Instagram: they rebuilt twenty-five houses from the ruins, renovated a school in the village of Kolychivka, and provided materials for the renovation of one hundred and fifty houses that they then participated in; they prepared and delivered forty thousand portions of food and distributed one thousand food parcels in the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions.

Futymsky explains personal involvement with care. The state, especially in times of war, will not be able to show that care to all its citizens. Uneducated or weakened links between state institutions and inhabitants of villages and towns result in a demand for care without a specific addressee. Around that care, interactions are formed between volunteer initiatives and beneficiaries of these activities. Yaroslav explains that during the reconstruction he deals, among other things, with "taking care of things" – in every place he repeats the same activities that are used to "steal these areas away from war".

It might seem that, in 2022, artistic practices had been suspended for a long time. Indeed, it took some time before it became possible to read, stage performances, or organise exhibitions again. It also took a while to explore the "landscape" to find out how much it had changed – what new elements had appeared in it, and what continues to work in the old way. "At some point, a full-blown war took me back to the twentieth century", says Yaroslav. During his trip to Chernihiv region, he started writing again in a red hardcover notebook and took pictures with an iPhone 7 and a Canon Sure Shot multi-tele.

> Text: "This is a land of scraps. This is a land of forest strips. This is a land of hiding places. This is a land of cigarette butts. This is a land of blood. It is a painful land.
> I recognize something in this landscape – it is you, the territory".

In the photo: a wooden double-leaf gate in a private house, with an inscription written in white paint: "ДЕ | ТИ" (DE | TY). This Cyrillic inscription in the combined spelling can be read in Russian as "children"; this is how the residents signalled to the military that there were children in the house. In Ukrainian, when read separately, the words mean: "Where are you" (or: "Where you are").

Other spaces and their ghosts

In the spring of 2023, Stanislav Turina posted these words on Facebook: "Recently I've been thinking about ghosts...". This sentence brings to mind Ukrainian landscapes. Within a year, they were swarmed with ghosts, both old and new. Some have appeared recently, others have returned from the abyss of oblivion. Ghosts are hunted: if they inhabit a space, you can try to disperse them by weakening the collective memory of previous life forms. Missiles and bombs, bullets and projectiles bring with them new tragedies; they obscure the view, they test the memory, which is grasping at the possibility of surviving in the ruins. My generation has just discovered that any place can be destroyed at any moment.

On September 8, 2022, I gave a speech as part of the Ukrainian day of the Venice Film Festival. I mentioned one of my favourite films by Michelangelo Antonioni, *The Red Desert*, which won the Golden Lion here in 1964. I also talked about the Kharkiv artist Pavlo Makov, the author of the work shown in the Ukrainian pavilion at the Art Biennale. Both themes intertwine in Kharkiv: in 2019, curator Luca Fiore and I put on the exhibition "The Way of Aeneas. Today's artists face to face with the past". We showed Antonioni's latest short film and Makov's art album Do Po. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the art centre premises turned into a bunker where Makov and his wife Maryna spent the first days of the siege.

The Russian aggressor also attacked culture, spaces, their features and meanings. When an art centre becomes a bunker; when, after the withdrawal of the Russian army, it turns out that the exhibits have disappeared; when exhibits have to be taken from museum premises so that they are not destroyed or looted; when a precisely aimed rocket destroys the museum of the philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda in the village of Skovorodynivka or the house by the painter Polina Raiko in Oleshky near Kherson – then this means that the war broke into culture and forced it to take on the role of both a weapon and a shelter. In order to stay alert and not lose what the war is trying to take away, one should practice optical aberration in looking at landscapes. This method allows you to see the past versions of places which affect the present. The past versions matter if the current condition has been destabilized and we are constantly modifying our actions. "Our" spaces change; after returning to them, after losing or regaining them, they appear in a new version. On this quicksand we connect, disintegrate, and reassemble into new temporary communities. ●

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Reconstruction of houses destroyed during occupation in the Chernihiv region
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photo: Yaroslav Futymskyi

1 Equivalent of "Congratulations on the occasion of..." (or "greetings on the day of...").

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Horizontal Network State

The escalation of the war in Ukraine in 2022 surprised the whole world, but perhaps the Ukrainians themselves were the least surprised. The experience of the last two decades has taught them to be flexible in responding to changing circumstances and to smoothly develop competences that are typically – that is, in times of peace – reserved for the state. Civic organizations and their activists joined the massive popular support in the defensive effort and the distribution of social services. In this country, 5% of people declare that they have volunteered and been socially involved in helping the armed forces, refugees, and people in need on a full-time basis; 35% declare that they have done so part-time as a side job.[1] At the same time, the largest collection of material resources and money in the history of post-war Europe is taking place. The account of the Armed Forces of Ukraine at the National Bank of Ukraine alone received more than $600 million in the first year after the escalation. Sociologists are surprised by the efficiency of Ukrainian society and the ability of Ukrainians to put public interest above private interest, which, after all, is not the rule in capitalism. It is therefore worth asking where Ukrainian society's adaptive skills come from.

I

From the European perspective, for two decades Ukraine has been seen as a country where civil society intermittently takes matters into its own hands. In 2004, several hundred thousand people came to Kyiv's Independence Square (Maidan Nezalezhnosti) in defence of the fraudulent presidential elections, and that was just on the first evening of the protests. The inhabitants of Kyiv who lived nearby spontaneously brought tea and warm clothes to the protesters. Over the next few days, several hundred tents were pitched on the city's main street, Khreshchatyk, in which several thousand people camped day and night. The protests were a show of solidarity with the opposition, but they were also a display of grassroots organization skills. During the several weeks of the protests, not a single window was broken, not a single shop was plundered. The Orange Revolution was the first mass uprising seeking to break the existing social contract in Ukraine. It was admirable also because it was bloodless. As Marcin Wojciechowski writes in his book *Pomarańczowy Majdan* (The Orange Maidan), "the Maidan became the highest – albeit informal – organ of the government, a power-wielding body in Ukraine, and from that moment on it was the power that every authority had to reckon with".[2]

Unfortunately, the peaceful transition of power could not be repeated a decade later during the Revolution of Dignity. The events of February 2014 resulted in hundreds of casualties. However, before the Berkut troops stormed the Maidan, the Ukrainians again gave a perfect performance of self-organization. Kyiv's Euromaidan had medical points, field kitchens, toilets, a press centre and even an improvised library. Despite the interruption in the provision of municipal services, garbage was systematically removed. The rhythm of the day was determined by the Ukrainian anthem, played by a trumpeter who remains anonymous to this day. Also, during the fighting there were paramedical units taking care of the wounded on an on-going basis. Despite the chaos, the protesters tried to prevent damage to property: while the statue of Lenin was toppled in the city centre, the monument to the legendary coach of the capital city's football team, Valery Lobanovskyi, was carefully wrapped in blankets near the Dynamo Kyiv stadium.[3]

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Living in the exhibition space of Yermilov Centre for Contemporary Art in Kharkiv, February 2022
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photos: Archive of the Yermilov Centre for Contemporary Art in Kharkiv

II

Last year's escalation of war found Ukrainians in a process of social and national consolidation that had been on-going since the end of the Revolution of Dignity. During these eight years, the Ukrainians managed to build what Edwin Bendyk calls a "horizontal network state", namely a well-connected civil society that is an active participant in public and political debate. The foundations for this structure were laid by the decentralization of the state, completed in 2020 with local elections. In the first days of the war, self-governing municipalities and their inhabitants not only organized supplies but also built self-defence structures, and in the occupied territories they were the cornerstone of social resistance. Ukrainian sociologist Yevhen Holovakha further argues that the full-scale Russian aggression nullified the pre-existing social tensions related to the linguistic

1 N. Otreshko, *Ukrainian society in the conditions of 2022 war*, Kyiv: Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2023.
2 M. Wojciechowski, *Pomarańczowy Majdan* [The Orange Maidan], Warszawa: W.A.B., 2006, p. 282.
3 T. Liutyi, *#Euromaidan – History in the making*, Kyiv: Osnovy Publishing, 2014.

and territorial division of the country. Indeed, today the inhabitants of western and eastern Ukraine see each other more plainly than ever before.

Mariia Varlygina, a curator from Kharkiv, says that most of her friends who decided to leave the city ended up in Lviv. In March 2022, she also boarded a train going to Kyiv, but it went only as far as Lviv. It is estimated that about 30% of Ukrainians have had to leave their homes because of the war. The mass relocation of the population from the eastern districts to safer regions in the centre and west of the country has resulted in a rapid cultural and linguistic consolidation. More has happened in this regard within the last year than in the over thirty years of independence. Ukrainians began to see themselves as a political nation, having their own agency and capable of creating history.

Ukrainians coming from other regions of the country to Lviv, despite their difficult financial situation, quickly joined in social work to support other refugees. After arriving in Lviv, Anastasiia Leliuk, a visual artist from Luhansk, slept on the floor of a flower shop for several days. “Never before have I seen such crowds in Lviv”, she recalls. “My friends and I immediately got involved in volunteering: cooking, sewing camouflage nets, or sorting humanitarian aid from Poland “.[4] Kharkiv artist Vladyslav Yudin was regularly on duty at the railway station, where he helped the arriving people find their bearings in the new linguistic and topographical reality.

III

According to the information provided by the press office of the mayor of Kyiv, by mid-March 2022 more than half of the capital’s inhabitants had left temporarily. At the same time, Dnipro received about 320,000 people from the east of the country. A total of about 6.5 million people in Ukraine moved westwards. ○

○ / ○ / Some internally displaced people have returned to their homes over time, but others simply have nowhere to go back to. This is best seen on the example of Bakhmut, which had 70,000 residents before the war, and today no more than 10% of its inhabitants remain. Pavlo Kyrylenko, head of the Donetsk military administration, estimates that more than 60% of buildings in the city have been either turned to rubble or rendered uninhabitable. In Mariupol, this might be as much as 90% of the buildings. In this situation, the problem of permanent accommodation for refugees is urgent.

In March 2022, the non-governmental organization MetaLab, which is based in Ivano-Frankivsk, launched the Co-Haty pilot project, which consisted in adapting an uninhabited student dormitory to new functions. In just 6 weeks, 24 apartments, 4 kitchens, a children’s playroom, a laundry room, and a co-working space were set up, covering over 2,000 square meters. Over 150 volunteers took part in this work, most of whom were internally displaced persons themselves from various regions of Ukraine. 170 new residents moved into the building in May 2022. Since then, MetaLab has adapted three more buildings with a total capacity of 650 people.[5]

Parallel to these bottom-up ad hoc actions, there is a discussion about systemic solutions for rebuilding the country. One participant of this debate is the Kharkiv architect Oleh Drozdov, who moved to Lviv together with the Kharkiv School of Architecture, which he runs. Drozdov calls for the inclusion of society in the processes of planning and rebuilding the country on the largest possible scale: entire housing estates, districts, or even cities. It is estimated that the reconstruction process may cost up to USD 750 billion, so it is hardly surprising that developers are also salivating over this money. Fortunately, the authorities also see the historic opportunity that Ukraine is facing today. President Volodymyr Zelensky speaks openly about it: “We can change the conditions of our lives, introduce high-quality city planning where there was none before”.[6]

Drozdov draws attention to the threat of intellectual colonization associated with reconstruction. This is how Norman Foster’s studio’s declaration of involvement in the reconstruction of Kharkiv was perceived in Ukraine. ○

○ / An architect from Luhansk, Petro Vladimirov, who lives in Poland, believes that post-colonial narratives should not be employed during the decolonization war with Russia.[7] Meanwhile, this proposal from a well-known British architect is an excellent argument for municipal authorities not to ask people for their opinion and to settle the matter of reconstruction without consulting them. Drozdov stresses that as part of the reconstruction it is necessary to create generally accessible places that would maintain the existing social ties and build new ones.

IV

Two days before the escalation of the war, on February 22, 2022, the Enfant Terrible exhibition by Kharkiv artist Oleh Kalashnik opened at the Yermilov Centre for Contemporary Art in Kharkiv. Two days later, a group of Kharkiv artists with their families and pets were in a panic, looking for a place to hide from Russian bombs. Their choice fell on the Yermilov Centre due to the location of the gallery, which is in the basement of the constructivist building belonging to the Vasyl Karazin University of Kharkiv. For ten days, the artists lived in the exhibition space, transforming it into their temporary home. ○

○ / One of Kalashnik's works became a sandbox for the group's children, while a projector which was part of another work was used for evening film screenings. It is ironic that the works presented at the exhibition dealt mostly with military and war themes. In the photos documenting the artists' stay in the gallery, children can be seen playing among Kalashnik sculptures depicting Soviet soldiers. On the anniversary of these events, the material recorded in the gallery was shown as a full-fledged art project entitled *How are you doing*.

While Kharkiv's artists were testing a new form of relationship between an art institution and the artistic community, the rest of the city's residents took refuge in metro stations. Underground railway systems in all countries of the former Soviet Union were specifically designed in such a way that they might be easily converted into shelters in the case of war. This idea was developed in literature two decades ago by the Russian writer Dmitry Glukhovsky – incidentally, a firm critic of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. At the turn of March 2022, life in the subway – on the platforms and in the carriages – became fact, not fiction. Kharkivites put cots, stools, and other everyday items into the stationary

Living in the *Enfant Terrible* exhibition space by Oleh Kalashnik, a Kharkiv artist, Yermilov Centre for Contemporary Art in Kharkiv, February 2022
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Photos: Archive of the Yermilov Centre for Contemporary Art in Kharkiv

4 Quotes without source attributions come from the author's private conversations.
5 MetaLab 2022 Report, annual report published on the organisation's website.
6 M. Sutowski, *Springer: Ukraińcy walczą, a Zachód gada, jak tu na powojennej odbudowie zarobić dobry hajs* [Springer: Ukrainians are fighting, and the West talks about how to make a buck] Krytyka Polityczna 12 April 2023, https://krytykapolityczna.pl/swiat/springer--ukraina-odbudowa-zachod/ (accessed: 8 May 2023).
7 F. Springer, *Pytania otwarte* [Open questions], "Pismo" 2023, No. 2(62).

The Soup for Ukraine project in action at CSW Wiewiórka, Kraków, April 2022
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photos: Artur Wabik

trains. This "domestication" of the metro was accompanied by attempts to give the space an individual, almost intimate character, so it was decorated with fresh flowers, or pictures were glued to the walls. Paradoxically, as many people report, life in the subway was not so different from life in a communal block, where you also have to make neighbourly compromises.

About 1,500 children found shelter among the crowds of adults at the twenty-nine stations of the Kharkiv metro. With the financial support of UNICEF, Ukrainian volunteers created special zones for them to play and learn: playgrounds and common rooms with art materials, where lessons and physical activities with teachers and psychologists were held. In one of these zones, even a theatre play was rehearsed and staged. Art exhibitions were organized regularly. As a result of the counter-offensive and the pushing of the Russian troops to the border of the oblast, the Kharkiv metro resumed its operation at the end of May. This meant that people who had spent almost three months there now had to leave the station. Many people had nowhere to go back to or were simply afraid to leave the tunnels. Some of them received temporary accommodation in a sanatorium hospital on the outskirts of the city.

According to the deputy mayor of Kharkiv, Svitlana Gorbunova-Ruban, around 5,000 people found shelter from Russian shelling in the Kharkiv metro in spring. As recently as December, fifty-three people who refused to leave the underground were permanently accommodated at the *Heroiv Pratsi* (Heroes of Labour) station. During the Christmas period, the city authorities decided to move the Christmas tree and the annual Christmas village, both of which are usually on the main square of the city, to the University station so as not to expose visiting residents to shelling. An additional reason was to save electricity. A letterbox was placed next to the Christmas tree, where children could write requests for gifts (and often also pleas for peace in Ukraine) addressed to Ded Moroz ("Grandfather Frost", or Saint Nicholas). The press conference of President Volodymyr Zelensky, organized in April at the Independence Square metro station in Kyiv, also went down in history.

V

We know from research conducted by Ukrainian social scientists that trust in public institutions before the escalation of the war was very low. In 2019, Zelensky won 73% of the votes in the second round of the presidential election, but a year later the level of trust in him had decreased to only 31.3%. Today, support for the president is around 91%, and only 6% of the population have a negative opinion of him.[8] Citizens' rate of linking their personal identity to political entities also skyrocketed: identifying with the state increased from 33% in 2020 to 69% in 2022; identifying with the region increased from 31% to 60%, and identifying with the city increased from 49% to 75%. At the same time, trust in social organizations (pro-bono), women's rights organizations, pro-environmental organizations, and volunteers also increased. Trust in charity or pro-bono organizations

increased from less than 50% in 2020 to 77.6% in 2022, in women's organizations from 34.8% to 59.5%, and in pro-environmental organizations from 45.1% to 54.1%. In other words, the character of social consolidation is civic, not populist. The war has also increased the appreciation of democracy as the best form of political system, and this appreciation is the highest among Ukrainians under the age of thirty (72%)[9].

As recently as February 2022, many citizens felt that they were on their own. Information chaos prevailed, fuelled by Russian propaganda. There was no consensus among the inhabitants of the eastern districts as to whether to flee, and if so, to where. ○

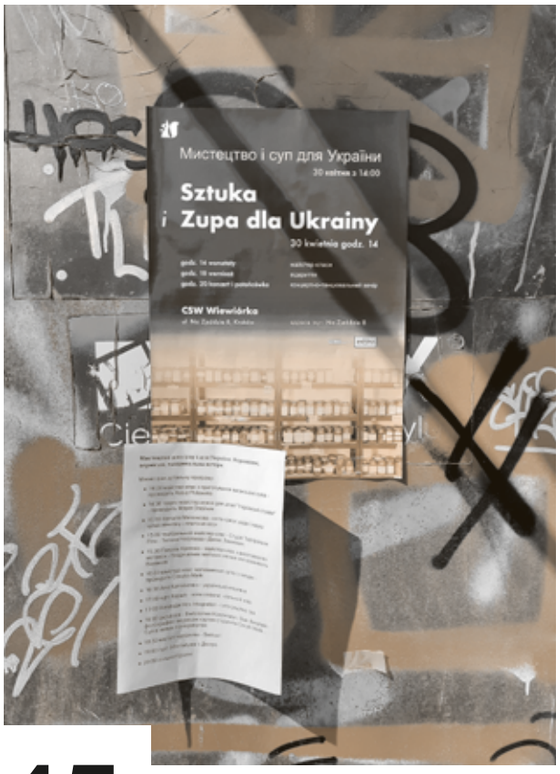
VI

In response to the mass emigration of Ukrainians to the countries of the European Union, spontaneous chains of humanitarian aid sprang up, created, among others, in Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. In the absence of systemic solutions, volunteers formed micro-task groups, which turned out to be surprisingly effective. I know this first hand because I myself co-created a group that organized transport and temporary homes for refugees in the first month of the migration crisis. Over time, some of these grassroots initiatives have grown to impressive proportions. A good example is Kraków's Soup for Ukraine, a spontaneous action, initiated by Katarzyna Pilitowska at the railway station, which turned into a long-term program to feed refugees. At its peak, the volunteers of Soup for Ukraine served up to a thousand meals a day.

According to data published at the end of October 2022 by the Central Statistical Office, seven out of ten Polish households provided assistance to Ukrainians in the first four months after the escalation of the war. At the same time, non-governmental organizations in cooperation with entrepreneurs launched language courses, vocational training courses, and private brick-and-mortar Ukrainian schools in the largest Polish cities. We turned out to be as efficient as the Ukrainians themselves in organizing the lives of refugees and replacing the state in this respect.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainians themselves have developed a specific war-life balance. During my January visit to Lviv, I had the impression that life in the city continued pretty much as usual – quite "normally". It was still interrupted by increasingly rare bomb alerts; it was hooked up to power generators standing on the sidewalks in front of every shop. This "new normal" is an attempt to sustain life in a biological as well as a cultural dimension. Taras Voznyak, director of the Lviv Art Gallery, says: "working theatres, libraries, cinemas and concert halls are as important an element of resistance as military action".[10] Civic society turned out to be an extremely important component of the Ukrainian struggle for independence and agency. Drozdov calls it a "temporary civic society" and fears its rapid disappearance, but for now it is the basis of the survival of the state. ●

○ / ○ / **Anastasiia Leliuk, whom the escalation of the war found on a train from Lviv to Kyiv – that is, in the opposite direction to most other people – says that she felt better prepared for this situation than others. "My friends didn't really know how to behave. It was the second time for me. I was seventeen when Russia set my house on fire. At that time, I literally left Luhansk on the last train", she says. The flight from Donbas in mid-2014 was a formative experience for Anastasia. Her war route led from Luhansk, through Dnipro, to Kyiv, where she had already packed her suitcase and prepared the necessary documents to be able to move on at any time.**



8 Research conducted by the US National Democratic Institute in the first half of January 2023. The International Institute of Sociology in Kyiv was responsible for field research.

9 E. Bendyk, *Jak Ukraina i wojna w Ukrainie zmienia cały świat* [How Ukraine, and the war in Ukraine, is changing the whole world], Oko Press, 24.02.2023, https://oko.press/edwin-bendyk-jak-ukraina-i-wojna-w-ukrainie-zmienia-caly-swiat (accessed: 8 May 2023).

10 Address during the "For Intellectual Bravery" award ceremony, Lviv Art Gallery, December 2022.

INGA HAJDAROWICZ

ILLUSTRATIONS KIRA PIETREK

Everyday practices of life and resistance

The agency of Syrian refugee women in Lebanon

"*Nazelne hon, law samaht* – please drop me off here". On my way from Beirut, I get off in the centre of Chtaura – if it is correct to say that Chtaura, a triangular junction on the two-lane highway from Beirut to Damascus, even has a centre. A road of similar width leads diagonally towards Zahle and Baalbek. Exchange offices, jewellers, mobile phone shops and bakeries line both sides. Behind me, the rugged mountains of Lebanon rise like a lunar landscape; before me stretches the oddly urbanized terrain of the Beqaa Valley, where – beyond the never-ending concrete, wires, cables, garbage and dust of towns that merge into one another – there is green farmland, rolling far and wide. On the horizon, another mountain range looms, and on the top of the mountains, the border with Syria, only a dozen kilometres away.

I get out and start walking along the Damascus Highway towards the border. "*Szam? Szam!* Damascus!" Minibus drivers are desperately trying to persuade me to go with them to the Syrian capital, although with a small backpack and a firm step I make it clear that it is not the purpose of my journey. I run across the highway. Two lanes, stop, two more lanes. On the other side, drivers invite me to their minibuses going to Zahlé, to the Roman ruins in Baalbek, or to Beirut. Partly, because it is their livelihood, and partly because it is a game of sorts that they engage me in almost every day. I leave the noise of the intersection behind me. I walk along the highway, only three hundred metres, past plant nurseries, a bank, then I turn left and go around another bank. I run up the stairs to the second floor and finally I am safe, away from the noise of the freeway.

More or less the same route is covered by women from the village near the highway when they are going to the women's centre. Those who live further down the valley, in informal settlements of tents scattered between the farmland, need to take an expensive taxi or an auto rickshaw on top of that. Their mobility is also restricted by military checkpoints where residence permits can be checked, but only a dozen or so per cent of Syrians in Lebanon enjoy the privilege of holding such permits. The physical experience of crowded buses and the noise of Chtaura, and the sense of relief when we reach the second floor is something that we have in common – something that connects us despite our differences, the complexity of life's turmoil, and experiences related to gender identity. Tips for a smooth passage through Chtaura and choosing the right minibus are like secret knowledge – a great starting point for conversations.

The women's centre occupies an entire floor in an inconspicuous apartment building. To the left of the staircase, there is a large training room, a computer room, a psychosocial support room, and administration. On the wall is a banner with a list of demands, prepared during a workshop on the occasion of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls. After entering the centre, I turn right. The reception is managed by Asma; she writes down the names of girls who come to ask about available courses. I pass the large training room, which is being aired out before the start of an English lesson. A three-year-old girl opens the door of the room in the children's space and calls her mother. I glance at who's on duty in the library today and I go into the kitchen. Four women finish their last bites of bread with hummus and sip sweet tea before returning to their activities. One will teach an English lesson, another will conduct an individual therapy session, the third will join a meeting with young people about future theatre projects, and the fourth will stay with me in the kitchen to refine the details of the Women's Leadership Program, which will take place next weekend.

[field notes, November 2018]

As part of my doctoral research, I worked with and talked to several dozen regulars at the women's centre. They consider this place a safe space, a shelter, an asylum: an escape from the often-overwhelming reality, from violence, economic difficulties, and crowded homes. Women who gather here share common experiences of being a woman, a Syrian, a refugee; they are tempted by the chance to encounter differences of experience, nuanced by individual life trajectories, social class, level of education, professional experience, family situation, religious group, place of origin. Only women are allowed admission to the space of the centre. This restriction allows them to freely express themselves and access services and information from outside the broader patriarchal context of systemic and interpersonal violence.[1] The absence of men is also conducive to negotiating cultural challenges and reassuring family members who in other circumstances might have reservations about the participation of their wives or daughters in activities at the centre. ○

Yurie, a local activist, preparing for a class in a school she is running at a nearby camp
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photo: Inga Hajdarowicz

1 M. Megevand, L. Marchesini, *Women and Girls Safe Spaces: A Toolkit for Advancing Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Humanitarian Settings*, International Rescue Committee, International Medical Corps, 2020, https://reliefweb.int/report/world/women-and-girls-safe-spaces-toolkit-advancing-women-s-and-girls-empowerment (accessed: 2 May 2021).

○ / **The centre is a pillar of women's self-organization; it provides a space for learning, exchanging thoughts, caring, knowledge production, healing and recovery. What takes place here is individual transformations and preparations for active participation in or strengthening of the local community.[2]**

Women Now for Development, a Syrian feminist organization, runs two such centres in Lebanon. Its founders and members derive their activism from the Syrian revolution. In 2011, they participated in the organization of peaceful protests and local grassroots structures in areas liberated from the Assad regime.[3] For some, it was their first experience of political participation, while others were continuing their activities – undertaken earlier despite the authoritarian context – for women's rights or political freedom. In the centres, initially set up in Syria and then also in Lebanon, in

2 For more information about Women Now for Development approach to the role of safe spaces, see: *Women Safe Spaces as Facilitators for Justice Visions in the Syrian Context*, Women Now for Development, 2022, https://women-now.org/women-safe-spaces-as-facilitators-for-justice-visions (accessed: 15 April 2023).

3 L. Kannout, *In the Core or on the Margin: Syrian Women's Political Participation*, Syrian Feminist Lobby, 2017, https://syrianfeministlobby.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Study-Women-political-participation.pdf (accessed: 26 April 2022).

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Classes at Yurie's informal school
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photo: Inga Hajdarowicz

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Classes for female camp residents at a new women's centre run by the Together for Justice initiative, founded by graduates of the women's leadership program
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photo: Inga Hajdarowicz

addition to psychological support or courses in the practical skills (learning English, computer skills) that are necessary to find a job or help children at school, women also take part in awareness-raising courses. These classes can be compared to civic participation workshops supplemented with a women's rights component. They are keen to deepen their general knowledge during the Women's Leadership Program, which lasts several months. During this program, the participants discuss in detail the issues of human rights, gender identity, violence, political systems, and ways of communication useful to local activists. Women can participate in all activities at the centre, regardless of their level of education, which has often been interrupted by family decisions, war, or the need to flee.

I have been working with this organization and its people for five years. I have conducted interviews, observations, and workshops; I've had dozens of informal conversations over coffee. ○

○ / I've accompanied my heroines in the educational process, in their everyday personal struggles, and in political activities in various spaces. In the women's centre, which is the main axis of this text, the self-organization of refugee women is promoted; most importantly, this is done by refugee women themselves. Knowledge and experience play a special role in strengthening their sense of agency, developing their feminist awareness, and consequently in individual emancipation and collective action.

About the women at the table – around knowledge and experience

The bottom-up strategy of self-organization, planning and implementation of the centre's activities is mainly developed by Syrian women. What they share with the women who come to the centre is their experiences of exclusion and injustice in both Syria and Lebanon. Members of the organization and participants in the classes have experienced the loss of loved ones, economic difficulties, and political persecution by the Syrian regime. In Lebanon, they struggle with socio-economic degradation; they have problems with legalizing their stay, continuing their education, and ensuring that

4 I describe some of the challenges that Syrian women and men are facing in Lebanon in: "Żaden las albo puszcza nie powstrzyma pragnienia godnego życia". *Migracja jako odpowiedź na systemową przemoc wobec syryjskich uchodźców i uchodźczyń w Libanie* [No forest shall stop the desire for a life of dignity. Migration as a response to systemic violence against Syrian refugees in Lebanon], Badaczki i Badacze na Granicy [Researchers on the Border], https://www.bbng.org/zaden--las-albo-puszcza-nie-powstrzyma (accessed: 2.05.2023).

their children find a place in the school system.[4] Oula, Weam, Yasmin, Zahra and others have overcome many constraints and social expectations to become activists. I've already mentioned that most of the members of the organization actively participated in the Syrian revolution. They joined the uprising, demanding justice and freedom for all citizens, but they recognized that some women needed additional support to engage in collective action. They drew on the experiences of being judged by the community for their political activity and their observations of other women who were excluded from political discussions and decision-making processes. This knowledge motivated the launching of political participation courses at the women's centre. Today, these women look from within the community of refugee women, and this perspective allows them to better understand the context in which Syrian women want to organize and act for the benefit of their community. Thanks to this, the organizers respond to current needs but also think about systemic changes.

Putting people from the communities targeted by interventions at the centre of decision-making is not a new approach. In the 1970s, the gender perspective was already included in discussions on the humanitarian and development sectors; at subsequent World Conferences on Women, voices calling to increase the participation of refugee women in the planning and implementation of activities for them were increasingly heard and empowered.[5] The leaders in this field were activists from the Global South, including Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era at the forefront. Criticizing the first decades of development activities carried out by international organizations, they pointed to the intersection of gender-based exclusion with other forms of oppression. Despite the paradigm shift, many international organizations still construct an image of refugee women as a homogeneous group deprived of rights who should be educated and liberated or – depending on the views of the proponents of the changes – left in the static sphere of traditional culture. These seemingly contradictory approaches stem from "the objectification of the 'third-world woman', who is considered as being the bearer of difference".[6] Culture is perceived in an essentialist way as an unequivocal source of violence and oppression, without being situated in the social, political, or economic context that influences its character.[7] At the same time, the idea of sisterhood, sameness, and universal common struggle against patriarchy and oppression – as the foundation of possible cooperation – obscures the existing power relations and consequently ignores differences between women.[8] Hence the need to listen again to the voices of women "in the field" – to recognize their position not only as informants or consultants, but also as architects, agents of change, and participants in events. ○

○ / The core of the learning process is women's bottom-up knowledge gained through their daily practice of resistance and life. The individual situation provides a basis for analysing the existing power relations, naming the hierarchies behind them, and discussing the possibilities of individual and collective change.

Memories of childhood (unequal treatment of brothers and sisters) or of important women in the community gaining space for their own activities become an impulse to discuss gender roles and gender-based violence. Participants tell stories about the activities of women during the revolution, from organizing grassroots self-government structures and demonstrations to carrying medicines to besieged cities, dressing the wounded, hiding protesters, sewing flags, or organizing activities for children despite the shelling; they then discuss the definition of political activity and its manifestations. The experience of surviving the war and the siege, of everyday efforts to provide for the family – often marked by mourning for the dead or risky attempts to obtain information about those arrested or missing (usually murdered by the regime) – turns into a chance to recognize the subjectivity and agency of women; it turns into the beginning of a difficult conversation about restorative justice, about the prospects for coexistence between families of victims and perpetrators in future Syria.

5 M. Hajdukowski-Ahmed, N.Khanlou, H. Moussa, *Introduction*, [in:] *Not Born a Refugee Woman*, eds. M. Hajdukowski-Ahmed, N.Khanlou, H. Moussa, New York: Berghahn Books, 2009; N. Kagal, L. Latchford, *Towards an Intersectional Praxis in International Development: What Can the Sector Learn from Black Feminists Located in the Global North?*, "Gender & Development" 2020, vol. 28, No. 1.

6 Z. Ali, *Women and Gender in Iraq: Between Nation-Building and Fragmentation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 11.

7 N. Yuval-Davis, *Nationalist Projects and Gender Relations*, "Narodna Umjetnost. Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research" 2003, vol. 40, No. 1; Z. Ali, Women..., op. cit.

8 S. De Jong, *Complicit Sisters: Gender and Women's Issues across North–South Divides*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

The approach that puts the experience of learners at the centre of the learning process has many common elements with feminist critical pedagogy,[9] which was originally proposed in opposition to the traditional model of education that primarily assumes the assimilation and memorization of existing knowledge. Lived experiences are the starting point for thinking about the "why?" and for understanding the conditions that affect personal trajectories and lead to oppression. Individual narratives are complemented by a historical and structural context which allows us to see a situation not as a result of personal failures but as an effect of an unjust system.[10] The key role is played by educators, members of Women Now for Development, and invited trainers. They not only transfer knowledge but also create conditions for its co-creation. By participating in a pedagogical process organised in this manner, participants in this process remind themselves of the value of their own experience and challenge the ideology that presents them as passive and incompetent. They gain confidence in their own knowledge and, consequently, in their own agency.[11] Educators are neither apolitical nor objective: they enter the space of thought exchange with their own views and hopes. Just like other participants, they are constantly learning, and this requires radical openness – a willingness to explore different perspectives and change opinions when new information comes to light.[12]

Sara Ahmed describes the process of building feminist awareness in her book Living a Feminist Life.[13] She believes that it begins with a vague feeling that something is wrong – a sense of injustice that is sometimes difficult to name. It arises when one is experiencing violence or exclusion that is so overwhelming that one cannot react immediately, or when there are no words or point of reference to name what is happening to us. The key to capturing this situation is meetings with other women, during which the victim realizes that she is not alone in her experience. Therefore, although these experiences cannot be reduced to isolated cases or events, certain regularities can be seen in them. They show that violence affects some groups more than others; in other words, it is systemic. Thanks to conversations and collective work on personal stories, the participants of the meetings learn from each other the words that are helpful in naming their experiences and the intersecting structures of oppression. Also, when discussing the concepts of politics or violence that are introduced by the trainers, women are encouraged to bring their own point of view and consider how these theories can be applied to the analysis of individual situations. ○

○/ Emotions are an inseparable element of these personal and often difficult stories. From the beginning of our cooperation, the organization sensitized me to the fact that these stories play a key role that is essential not only for understanding other people but also for talking about oneself and one's own needs, on one's behalf and in one's own name. Equally important are collective moments of joy, as well as despair, fatigue, and tears shed over new and old traumas. Not all trainers from outside accepted such an approach with understanding: they expressed fear that experiencing emotions together could overwhelm and re-victimise the participants. They also questioned the place of emotions in the professional space of education.

Sceptical comments about the role of emotions in the process of learning and fostering political agency reflect the discussion about personal and emotional elements' relationship with the feminized private sphere, which is devalued in the rational and positivist Western approach to the production of knowledge. Researchers of emancipation pedagogy explain that: "emotionality is a feminized construct associated with irrationality, unruliness and shame – something that must be controlled to avoid disrupting the normal and rational social and physical order".[14] Emotions are mentioned in the literature of feminist pedagogy as an important element of transformative learning,[15] whereas researchers and practitioners emphasize the need for individual and collective recognition and affirmation of emotions in the process of understanding one's own experience in structural contexts.[16] Therefore, vulnerability is not suppressed or undermined; instead, it is embraced as a form of strength and courage, or simply as the current state experienced by the person.

Intersectional *praxis*

Sharing knowledge from personal experience helps to map common challenges, but it also reveals the various manifestations and causes of oppression in the lives of Syrian women. In the self-organization supported by Women Now for Development, intersectionality is understood more broadly than as merely an analysis of factors reinforcing the discrimination of individuals; it is also seen as a form of critical praxis[17] that incorporates this type of reflection into life, activism, and action strategies.[18] In order to implement the thus-understood theoretical assumptions of intersectionality in practice, it is necessary to create a space for a variety of different perspectives to emerge.

9 The term "feminist critical pedagogy" is based on two trends in pedagogy: the critical and the feminist. Although the two developed independently of each other, they both underscore the role of individual experience as a source of knowledge as well as a space of transformation. Consistently with the educational approach proposed by the Syrian women activists, feminist pedagogy puts emphasis on the analysis of various forms or patriarchy and the intersecting systems of oppression. This is why, in terms of methodology, and in terms of terminology as well, I am merging the two approaches.

10 P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*, New York: Continuum, 2020.

11 P. Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London–New York: Bloomsbury, 2014.

12 bell hooks, *Teaching Community. A Pedagogy of Hope*, New York: Routledge, 2004.

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Participants in the women's leadership program, resting between intense discussion sessions
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photo: Inga Hajdarowicz

The women are sitting in a circle. There is a thirty-one-year-old mother of three who was married off at fifteen. She is trying to pass her secondary school exit exams, and at every step she encourages her neighbours to join the groups that she is co-organising. A forty-seven-year-old mother of seven has fifteen years of experience running home day-care centres for neighbourhood children in Syria. After her husband was detained by the Syrian regime, she was left to her own devices and had to look for work and support her family alone. A twenty-nine-year-old student had to interrupt her studies because of the shelling; after four years of slave labour, in exchange for an apartment for herself and her family, she founded an informal school for children in her camp. A forty-five-year-old mother of four (oldest son in exile in Germany since 2015) used to run an accessories shop in her hometown in Syria, and she now supports mothers and daughters by talking about reproductive health and family planning. She draws on her own experience of early marriage. A thirty-year-old activist with a university degree became involved in Syria in the work of a coordination committee in a city liberated from the regime. A young mother of three who survived a suicide attempt tries to rediscover her purpose and learn new skills to support other women in a similar situation.

[field notes 2018–2019]

The meetings and educational activities of such a diverse group are not without problems and challenges. Hierarchies resulting from personalities, political views, and life experiences are revealed; regional loyalties give impetus to generalizations. Careful moderation helps to navigate group processes and create a space for getting to know each other. Of the many skills taken from the workshops, the participants of the meetings emphasize the importance of elements of non-violent communication which encourage attempts to hear the reasons and understand the sources of a given stance or position. This approach helps them adopt an attitude of total openness in dealings with colleagues or family members, and it is especially useful when working with a diverse community that has participated in similar programs.

In order to support novice leaders in their social activities, the authors of the course included elements of practice. Participants are invited to join in role-playing tasks that allow them to test their strengths in negotiations, debates, conferences, and to practice formulating arguments, while discovering different perspectives and performing in front of an audience. Every morning a different group of volunteers prepares exercises for warming up and revising the material from the previous day; in the process, they develop their moderation skills. Space for practising doesn't stop at the women's centre. Since 2019, each edition of the program has funded several initiatives developed by its participants. In addition to money for the first months of operation, the originators can count on support from members of the organization at various stages of the process, from selecting the target group to designing and implementing the project. Several local women's centres, workshops and kindergartens have been established in this way in recent years. Graduates of the women's leadership program try to respond to the needs of their community and pass on the knowledge generated in collective learning processes.

The women's centre and the Women Leadership Program can therefore be perceived as counter-public spaces, namely spaces of withdrawal from inaccessible institutional politics and systemic oppression. In these spaces, goals and strategies are clarified, and alternative ways of doing politics are discussed.[19] The joint production of knowledge and thinking about alternatives to the current social and political order strengthen the sense of community, create a space for friendship, intimacy and care, and at the same time build a support system that is crucial if we want to take the ideas beyond the learning space. Despite the centripetal focus, counter-publics constitute a laboratory of ideas and skills that can be transferred to the public sphere.

Spaces of care

Sara Ahmed reminds us that the process of becoming aware of injustice and oppression is neither easy nor pleasant, and sometimes it takes a long time and encounters internal or external resistance. On an individual level, it requires recognizing that you were wrong before, reliving your own stories and decisions, and giving up a part of yourself; all this threatens to change your relationship with the world because the world does not participate in this restructuring. New knowledge and awareness may result in alienation from one's environment, which – even if violent – often guarantees survival in exile in an extremely precarious situation. Families – if they exist at all, as exile often uproots people from their communities and disrupts the existing support networks – do not always open up to change right away. This learning community cares about the participants, which makes them feel less powerless. They build new relationships and a sense of belonging;[20] they regain hope, thus increasing their chances of taking risks related to involvement in social change.[21] That is why Women Now for Development emphasizes the importance of long-term support, of accompanying women in their storytelling, and of analysing the power relations and inequality structures behind them, while gradually expanding the space of one's own autonomy, engagement or commitment.

Caring sheds light on the actions, "which include everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our

13 S. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 2017.
14 S.C. Motta, A.M. Esteves, *Reinventing emancipation in the 21st century: the pedagogical practices of social movements*, "Interface. A journal for and about social movements" 2014, vol. 6, no 1.
15 L.M. English, C.J. Irving, *Feminism in community: adult education for transformation*, Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2015.
16 D. Woodly, *Black feminist visions and the politics of healing in the movement for black lives*, [in:] Women Mobilizing Memory, eds. A.G. Altınay et al., New York: Columbia University Press, 2019.
17 The process of collective learning happens through the praxis understood as talking, questioning, reflecting, analysing, theorising, and acting again. Compare: W. Mignolo, C.E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, and Praxis*, Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 2018.
18 P. Collins, *Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas*, "Annual Review of Sociology" 2015, vol. 41.
19 N. Fraser, *Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy*, "Social Text" 1990, No. 25–26; E. Majewska, *Kontrpubliczności ludowe i feministyczne. Wczesna „Solidarność" i czarne protesty* [People's and feminist counter-publics. Early 'Solidarity' and the Black protests] Warszawa: Książka i Prasa, 2018.
20 M.A. Andrade, V. Miller, *Consciousness-Raising, Intersectionality and Movement-Building for Social Transformation*, [in:] *Power, Empowerment and Social Change*, eds. R. McGee, J. Pettit, London: Routledge, 2019.
21 S.C. Bettez, C.M. Dominguez, *Moving from individual consciousness raising to critical community building praxis*, [in:] *The SAGE Handbook of Critical Pedagogies*, eds. S. Steinberg, B. Down, London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

'world', to live our best lives in it. This world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we try to weave into a complex, life-sustaining web".[22] In this broad sense, care is understood both as focusing on and taking responsibility for the cause and as specific care practices, also perceived as survival strategies in a precarious reality, without burdening the individual with the entire responsibility for this task.[23] At the same time, caring reveals disproportions between the scope of responsibilities related to care and the limited power of carers. This raises questions about inequality. Care, considered by some feminists as a burden for women that forces them to push aside their needs, can be assessed in a neutral or positive dimension, although it remains unrecognized by the capitalist patriarchal order. Many of my interviewees, though not all of them, found caring practices important and rewarding. They would prefer not to question their identity, which is largely made up of being a mother, a grandmother, a sister, or an aunt. They unanimously declare that society does not appreciate their care work, and by continuing it in extremely precarious conditions in exile they take up a challenge or even take on a burden.

The community built around the Women Now and Women Leadership Program plays a key role in recognizing, supporting and creating spaces of care. All participants are involved in caring practices in different ways in a uniquely precarious context. Despite the sense of temporariness and instability that has been going on for years, they try to create a home and provide a decent life for themselves and their families. Therefore, recognizing the role of these activities for the community is a manifestation of care that allows it to last. In Syria, these women struggled to find food, shelter and education for their children or other family members, often after the sudden death or arrest of male family members, and after multiple displacements. In Lebanon, they face similar challenges and the consequences of an uncertain legal status and limited employment opportunities in a deteriorating economic situation. This group of women shares information about available services, financial support, job offers and training, and they give advice regarding problems with children or domestic violence. The group is also a source of knowledge and skills that can be used to organize the community – it is among these new friends that carers find partners for action. Teaching or accounting experience, knowledge of law or of the English language, and versatile use of social media and valuable contacts in the community are the basis for jointly planned initiatives.

Through mutual support in caring for family members and the community, the women's centre also provides a space for self-care. Although neoliberal narratives have shifted the responsibility for dealing with structural inequalities to the individual, the idea of self-care functions as a radical tool for the survival of individuals and groups in a precarious reality.[24]

The women's centre and the workshops offer space and time to reflect on one's needs – to re-dream about the future despite interrupted trajectories. Members of the emerging community show each other that new plans matter, and this helps to legitimize them. Sharing pain and struggles, venting anger, sadness and frustration often brings relief.

Between discussions, while sipping coffee or walking along the beach, there is room for joy and laughter on trips organized by Women Now. More equal relations hidden from the polarized and hierarchical world, built on reciprocity and attention to power relations, may just be the foundation for their reformulation.[25]

Instead of a summary – about political agency

Syrian women supported by activists, mentors, as well as newly established networks are trying to share their newly acquired knowledge within their communities. They start with the family, quickly becoming a point of reference for other women in the area – in their building, in the neighbourhood, or in the refugee camp. They use personal experiences to start a conversation about community needs and possible solutions. They set up new initiatives – more women's centres, kindergartens; they moderate discussions on violence against women and on children's rights; they run literacy, computer literacy, and computer graphics courses; they create handicrafts, sew menstrual products, educate about the dangers of forced marriage at too young an age (sometimes even as young as thirteen or fourteen).

The initiators know perfectly well the hardships of life in camps or crowded apartments, often without common spaces or places for rest. As part of their new projects, they try to arrange at least temporary safe spaces for the participants of their activities. They try to carry out long-term activities, but they are also ready to react in emergency situations. For example, during the 2019 floods in the Beqaa Valley, when thousands of refugees were displaced from their ruined tents, it was Women Now graduates who communicated with NGOs and coordinated the redistribution of humanitarian aid in their communities, particularly in the camps. They used their skills and their network of contacts acquired during the courses. In April 2023, when the Lebanese government began mass arrests and deportations of Syrian men and women, it was the women who organized online to support each other, to collect information about detainees, and to inform refugees about ways of legalizing their stay. They also attempted to counter

22 J.C. Tronto, B. Fisher, *Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring*, [in:] *In Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women's Lives*, eds. E.K. Abel, M.K. Nelson, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990, p. 40.

23 Tamże; H. Hobart, J. Kawehipuaakahaopulani, T. Kneese, *Radical Care: Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times*, "Social Text" 2020, vol. 38, No. 1 (142).

24 S. Ahmed, *Living...*, op. cit., H. Hobart, J. Kawehipuaakahaopulani, T. Kneese, *Radical...*, op. cit.

25 H. Hobart, J. Kawehipuaakahaopulani, T. Kneese, *Radical...*, op. cit.

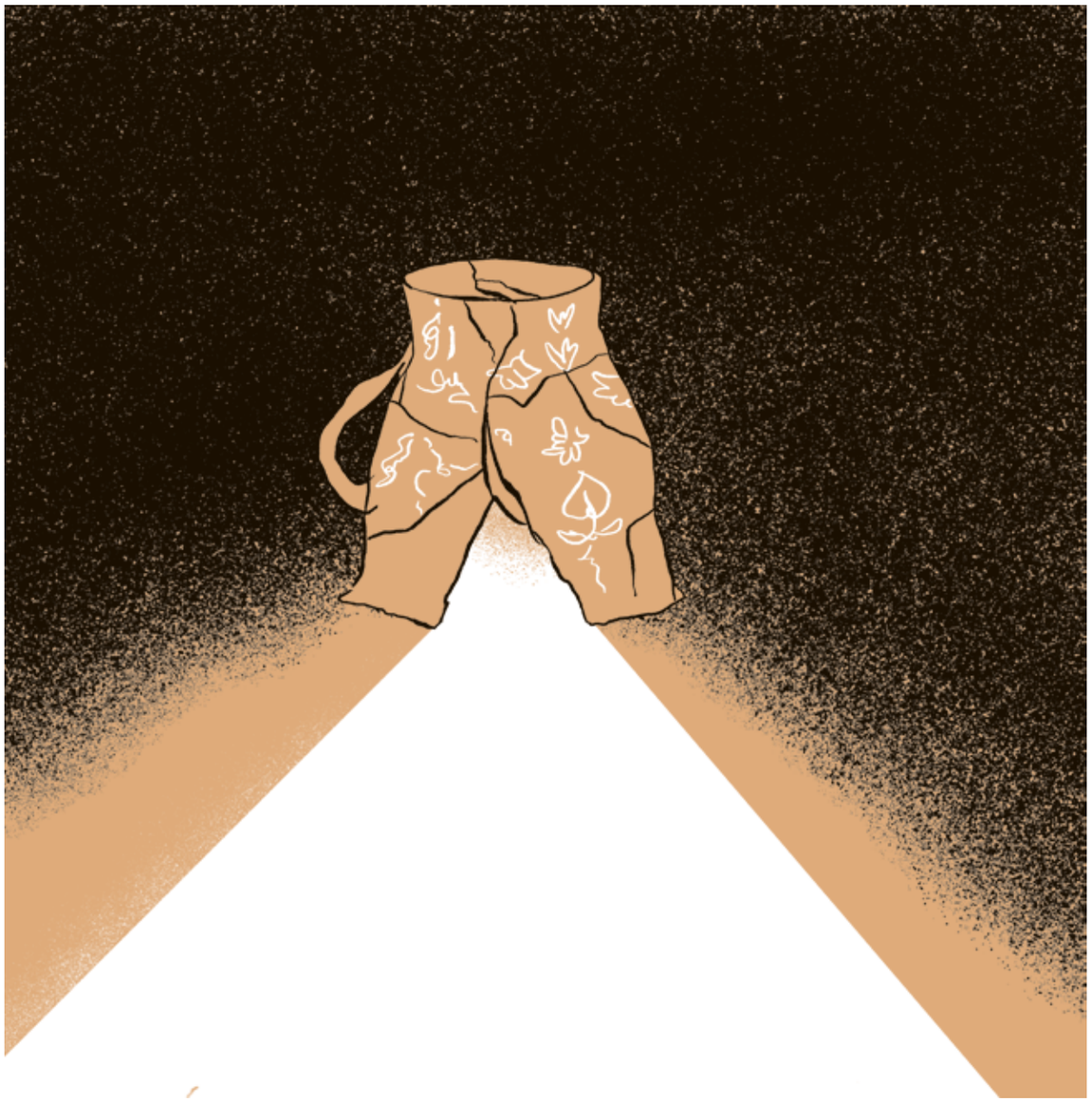
26 J. Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind*, London–New York: Verso, 2020.

rising tensions between their Syrian and Lebanese neighbours.

Activists are aware of the limitations of grassroots action. They see how much resistance their projects encounter from the community, traditional leaders, or even their own families. In the era of the economic crisis in Lebanon and dwindling international funds for people from Syria, it is difficult to ensure self-sufficiency for newly established initiatives. Women blame the progressive "NGO-isation" for this as it compels organizations to have a uniform way of operating, evaluating, and reporting, which forces them into the framework set by their donors and often deprives them of political character or political agency.

Although Women Now's main goal is grassroots initiatives, some women engage in other forms of political action that go beyond the local. They participate in conferences on human rights violations in Syria and on the situation of refugee women, and they belong to women's working groups that prepare postulates which take into account the gender perspective in the Syrian peace process. They join in the creation of advocacy campaigns; they testify to the oppression experienced by Syrian women, and they co-organize the activities of Families for Freedom – a network advocating for justice for detained and missing people in Syria. As Women Now emphasize, even when acting locally they participate in building a foundation for the feminist and Syrian national movement, developing feminist knowledge and nuanced narratives about refugee women as being able to self-steer their own lives and struggles. Referring to the tenets of the Women Now strategy and manifestations of political agency, together with the participants of my research, we define politics broadly as contesting, transforming, and sometimes reproducing norms and power relations in their personal lives or through collective actions.

The heroines of my research proved that being exposed to or threatened with violence or exclusion does not necessarily mean losing subjectivity and agency. That exposure, or the lack thereof, results from politics and unequal distribution of power; it is a derivative of social and historical relations.[26] Often, humanitarian actions define a particular population as requiring special care, thus negating its capacity for political action and extending bio-political forms of regulation and control. ○



○ / That is why it is so important to recognize the political agency of refugee women, to give space to participants of change, and to support their ways of self-organization. It is only in the space created by these women that we can meet and start making plans for transnational solidarity and cooperation. ●

NATALIA RACZKOWSKA

TALKS TO

JOANNĄ KUSIAK

We can still create anything

←
Homs. City streets in ruins, 2022
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photo: Anonymous; courtesy of Ammar Azzouz

NATALIA RACZKOWSKA: In the article *Comparative urbanism for hope and healing: Urbicide and the dilemmas of reconstruction in post-war Syria and Poland*,[1] written together with a Syrian researcher Ammar Azzouz, you address the issue of action despite the overwhelming destruction. Where does people's ability to resist come from in seemingly hopeless circumstances?

JOANNA KUSIAK: Let me start by explaining why we wrote this article, because this is important to me. It would not have happened if I hadn't met Ammar. I went to a lecture where Ammar, then still a PhD student, talked about his hometown, Homs. His personality and story resonated with what we – the people of Warsaw – know from history. ○

○ / ○ / **Images of Homs turned into a sea of rubble reminded me of Warsaw; furthermore, Ammar – an architect forced into political exile by the war – survived the trauma of urbicide, yet he never stopped thinking about the future of his city. He believes in that future, even though in the current situation there are clearly no rational reasons for hope. Such circumstances require radical hope. It is the kind of hope that is fed not by the current state of affairs but by the fact that the future is ontologically open, or to put it less philosophically, that we do not know what is going to happen. This is both bad news and good news: everything may be destroyed, but it is conceivable that we will create completely new possibilities and new systems. However, we must remember that the latter do not arise on their own accord; instead, action is needed. Radical hope is the practice of not giving in to the terror of the *status quo*, no matter how unfavourable it may be.**

NR: There are many differences between Warsaw and Homs – from their geographical location and cultural context, to the point in history in which they are located. What is it that connects these two cities?

JK: It is indeed difficult to compare Warsaw and Homs, but then urbicide looks the same everywhere. It results in a sea of rubble that levels all differences. I believe that these experiences are universal. We started writing the aforementioned article two years ago. Russia committed a full-scale assault against Ukraine before it was published, and the same thing is happening there now: architects and urban planners, both those who stayed and those who left the country, are organizing and thinking about reconstruction. For now, it is impossible to predict how and when the war will end. Radical hope in the borderline situation of urbicide does not depend on the cultural context. We used the examples of Warsaw and Homs because we come from these cities. We write from within our own experiences, so it was easy for us to universalize the most personal elements. There are more links as Poland and the Middle East have a long history of post-war exchange of ideas and collaborations. Łukasz Stanek wrote about this.

NR: Urbicide destroys more than just the urban fabric. You mention urbicide as a type of geotrauma. What is that?

JK: Man is a spatial being, related to space. Geotrauma is the trauma of both a person and a place – the individual and the collective. In Warsaw, this does not require explanations. Everyone in this city knows that the historical experience of violence is still tangible in its fabric. It manifests itself in three forms: firstly, in the obsession with commemoration – ubiquitous plaques and monuments; secondly, in the material bullet marks; thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, in the memories and bodies of people, including but not limited to the still-living insurgents and civilians – war survivors. Science has long proven that certain neurological characteristics we see in traumatized people are passed down to the generations that follow. We carry the traumas of past generations in our bodies, but also in our society, in the stories that shape us. Commemoration – such as on August 1, when the whole of Warsaw stops and the alarms sound – but also fatigue with the trauma and resistance to the obsession with commemoration are elements of post-traumatic work, of working through trauma. An important part of this process, already at its early stage, is hope and leaning into the future. ○

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Warsaw. Streets after the bombing in September 1939
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Author unknown; National Digital Archives

1 J. Kusiak, A. Azzouz, *Comparative urbanism for hope and healing: Urbicide and the dilemmas of reconstruction in post-war Syria and Poland*, "Urban Studies", April 2023, accessed: 10.1177/00420980231163978.

Warsaw. Ruins of tenement houses
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photo: Author unknown; National Digital Archives

In the history of the reconstruction of Warsaw, I was most impressed by Szymon Syrkus. In a letter from Auschwitz, he wrote to his wife that living in a tight space with so many people would be an important reference point for him when building housing estates after the war. At first, this sentence seemed to me totally incomprehensible: a guy imprisoned in an extermination camp wonders how to use this experience in designing architecture – and yet, many people survived precisely thanks to positive thinking. We know this, among others, from psychologist Viktor Frankl, author of books about his experience in an extermination camp. A radical leap into the uncertainty of the future, an equal probability that the worst will happen or, on the contrary, the best will happen – these allow us to cling to hope in extreme situations.

Square next to a mosque in pre-war Homs
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photo: Dick Osseman / Wikimedia Commons CC BY 4.0

NR: Is radical hope just a thought mechanism that allows one to escape from trauma and imagine the future? Or is it possible to turn hope into action in extreme situations?

JK: Radical hope must not be confused with naive optimism. Radical hope does not assume that everything will be fine. Rather, it involves the production of meanings in a situation in which we do not know whether everything will be fine. It manifests itself in attempts to make sense of such senseless existential experiences as the Holocaust. Syrkus's behaviour can be called a practice of hope: in an extreme, inhuman situation, he looked into the future, but he was not escaping. He wasn't pretending that he was somewhere else or that terrible things weren't happening around him. Instead, he thought: How can I make sense of this experience and translate it into what is important to me? The vision of the city's future was important to him. He practiced hope from two points of view: individual and collective. I think that the miracle of the reconstruction of Warsaw, which Grzegorz Piątek described so beautifully in his book *Najlepsze miasto świata* (The Best City in the World), was achieved because many people were spiritually and practically prepared for it. It does not matter, I think, whether or not designs that Polish architects had drawn up during the war were ultimately implemented. What was the decisive factor was the readiness to get down to work when the day after the liberation, or the day after the revolution, finally comes. Thanks to spiritual preparation, reconstruction beyond political divisions was later possible.

NR: How can one practice hope? And how can it be connected with architecture – a highly pragmatic field?

JK: During World War II, the Architectural and Urban Planning Studio was active clandestinely in the Polish underground, while architects living abroad were openly active. The Polish School of Architecture was opened in Liverpool in cooperation with the Polish government in exile. Its students, for example, designed the reconstruction of Warsaw's Old Town as part of their final papers. In Syria, it is currently

very much the same: many architects, urban planners and activists work locally underground under assumed names, while others contribute from abroad. Ammar was employed at ARUP for many years, which means that he practised his profession in Great Britain, but after hours he created projects with other expats. He also implemented a large project called *Domicide* – a series of video interviews about the annihilation of home. Several episodes are available on YouTube, and I had the honour of participating in one. The key to action has always been mobilization – both underground and among expats – and so it continues to be.

NR: Shortly after its completion, the reconstruction of Warsaw served as a blueprint for many cities, including Lima and Skopje. These reconstructions were embedded in a specific political and economic situation, which is unlikely to repeat today. Is there room for actors other than global capital in contemporary reconstruction efforts – in Syria, but also in Ukraine? What significance might the on-going self-organization of architects have for future actions? What alliances seem important?

JK: After World War II, reconstruction was centralized and organized by strong states in both socialist and capitalist countries. This happened before globalization as we know it today; back then, no one speculated in real estate on an international scale. Now every investment in real estate, whether commercial or residential, is an event on the global market – actors with large capital immediately appear and try to make money off it. In itself, this desire would not necessarily have to be bad, but unfortunately it is often satisfied at the expense of residents or other beneficiaries of reconstruction. In Syria, the Assad regime uses the slogan of reconstruction as a pretext for political purges and raising capital. People suspected of opposing the regime are deprived of their homes. In the displaced areas, shopping malls and luxury apartment buildings are being constructed – large commercial buildings that the majority of the population cannot afford. This makes Syria's reconstruction bitter, making it harder to find reasons for hope. ○

○ / **Spiritual and intellectual preparation for the reconstruction process is needed primarily to avoid being naive when dealing with projects. After every major political collapse there does not have to be urbicide; after all, we remember what happened in Poland in the 1990s after the change of the political system. Actors with large capital always immediately appear and try to cynically take advantage of the situation. At the same time, the shock of war or change makes society vulnerable to such abuses.**

Fortunately, globalization also results in a global flow of knowledge. I work with Ammar as well as with architects and researchers from Ukraine to transfer and use the knowledge gained from previous experiences. Knowledge helps us to prepare for what may come.

NR: You mention the homogenization of society as one of the results of urbicide. How does it happen? How is exclusion encoded in space?

Reprivatization in Warsaw is an excellent example. It was carried out under the banner of social justice, but in fact it brought another wave of appalling injustice. We already know from research, publications, and the media that primarily a narrow group of professional businessmen benefited from the reprivatization process. Many of them became richer than the rightful heirs. Of course, the most harm befell the tenants of the reprivatized buildings and ordinary residents of Warsaw

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Warsaw. Ruins of tenement houses
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photo: Author unknown; National Digital Archives

because it is from them that public areas, schools, sports fields, etc. were taken away. The problem stemmed primarily from individually understood ownership in a situation of dramatic historical collapse, which the razing of a city to the ground is. Property is an artefact of the domain of law – it only encodes the specific moment of the last change in ownership, while excluding the circumstances in which that change took place. Again, I will use the example from Warsaw because we know and understand this context well. The owner of a tenement house in the ghetto, a Jew, sells it under pressure to save his life. By taking into account only the right of ownership, we render irrelevant the circumstances in which the transaction took place, and we reduce the situation to the simple information about who bought the tenement house and for how much. Such simplification was common in stories known from the Warsaw reprivatization. Property law ignores the fact that Warsaw was rebuilt using public money and social volunteer work. It ignores the participation in the reconstruction of the people who received an apartment as part of the payment for their physical effort. It only takes into account the last transaction, which – in actuality – enables and sanctions money laundering.

That same mechanism is now deployed by the Assad regime. They manipulate property titles, often resorting to violence. Syrians are losing their assets because property titles make it possible to place these people in a specific location in space. People who oppose the regime – which is now a capital offense – cannot simply claim that they want their plot of land back. If such a daredevil is tracked down, as a rule he loses his life, either in prison or at the hands of a hired assassin. Property titles owed to victims are transferred to people associated with the regime in forced purchase-and-sale transactions. The regime thus cynically exploits private property.

In times of war, archives are burned. Without them, it is easy to manipulate property rights – to destroy or falsify documents. It was no different in Warsaw during World War II. Sometimes a forgery can be proven, but we will probably never know the true scale of this practice. Therefore, when thinking about future restitution projects, we must bear in mind the manipulation dimension, as is known from Warsaw. If we resort to simple restitution, we risk reinforcing injustice.

NR: Is the reverse process possible? How can social justice be encoded in space?

JK: Urbicide disasters are a good reason to radically redefine the ownership structure. Land municipalisation in a disaster situation is wrongly considered a socialist tool. And yet the Warsaw decree also had its counterpart in Rotterdam. Socialization of land is widely used because to rebuilding a city would be impossible without it. At the end of the article, we offered a proposal for a set of tools that could be useful if we wish to secure social and historical justice in the new urban fabric. Many restitution projects include, among other things, the issue of restoring some of the social fabric. In pre-war Warsaw, we had enormous social diversity, including a large Jewish population and many residents of other nationalities. A similarly multinational and multicultural society existed in the Balkans before the war and before the collapse of Yugoslavia. Research shows that restoring social diversity fails when we use simple property restitution. Property rights do not constitute a tool that would allow certain social groups to stay in their historic areas because property titles become the subject of commercial speculation during war (or after war, when owners' heirs sell off their claims). In a situation of historical cataclysm, individualism leads to the deepening of injustice. The social fabric can only be preserved by a solution inspired by indigenous property structures that value collective property more than individual property – we have found no other method. In this system, it is necessary to assume that certain areas belong to certain larger social groups, not to individual people.

NR: Can this type of approach to property rights be introduced in a city that has not experienced a disaster and is not starting from scratch?

JK: The question about possibility can also be a question about hope. The whole world is currently plunged into several types of crises, including a housing crisis and a crisis of the model of individual ownership, whereas speculative capitalism is

Streets in Homs before the war
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photo: Dick Osseman / Wikimedia Commons CC BY 4.0

Homs. Destruction in the Bab Dreeb district
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photo: Bo yaser / Wikimedia Commons CC BY 3.0

Dąbrowszczacy helping to clear the rubble in Warsaw, 1947
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photo: Author unknown; National Digital Archives

flourishing. These problems not only concern cities that have been wiped off the face of the earth. When I am not writing articles about Syria, I am one of the spokespeople for the Berlin initiative of Deutsche Wohnen & Co. enteignen. We strive to socialise two hundred and fifty thousand apartments in Berlin in accordance with Article 15 of the German constitution. In 2021, we organized a referendum on this matter and won it with 60 per cent of the votes. Due to resistance on the part of the city authorities, the goal has not yet been achieved; the last elections in Berlin were won by the CDU, so for now there is no prospect of our demands being implemented. Even so, progress has been made because five years ago such a referendum would have had no chance of success.

NR: We are talking in the context of an issue of "Autoportret" devoted to self-organization. Anthropologists point out that crisis situations trigger people's extraordinary ability to self-organize and provide help and mutual support. How to develop grassroots activities at the intersection of institutional activities? And what to do if social energy runs out and solidarity reflexes fade away?

JK: The example of Warsaw shows that mobilization is not always universal: it gains and then loses popularity. The reconstruction plans were actually drawn up by a small group of architects, but at the right moment they got many people involved. ○

○ / ○ / It is a myth that social change comes through the power of the majority. Social change is always the doing of a well-organized minority of those who put in the work despite the seeming lack of prospects. Finally, a historic moment comes when the balance of power reverses, and when changes suddenly accelerate because people are prepared and have already done some of the work. Changes are never initiated by the majority. There is no point in complaining and hoping that eventually more of us will gather: we just have to do our job.

For your own sanity, it's worth telling yourself that the most important breakthroughs have always come from the work of an enthusiastic minority. As Margaret Mead wrote: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has".

NR: Does solidarity help in action? This word has a special tradition and history in Poland, and we like to argue about it. Do we have a chance to regain that? Does it make sense to bring it back in the debate, to separate it from the "Solidarity" movement? Or maybe we should return to the old ideals? If so, which ones?

JK: We won't get rid of this word from our vocabulary, and we absolutely should not try to do so. Despite the conflict within "Solidarity" and its subsequent disintegration, it was a powerful social movement and a beautiful chapter in the Polish tradition. It is naive to think that everything will always be cordial and pleasant and that we will avoid divisions, but both the "Solidarity" movement and the reconstruction of Warsaw show that mobilization across divisions is possible at crucial moments. In Warsaw, the priority was reconstruction, with particular emphasis on building accessible housing, as was brilliantly demonstrated by Grzegorz Piątek. People from both sides of the political barricade took part in the reconstruction effort. Even opponents of the new regime recognized that reconstruction was the primary goal: individual beliefs faded away in comparison to that and they wanted to contribute. Let's not forget this lesson.

NR: How can attitudes from the times of reconstruction, from the birth of a certain movement, be translated into today's realities? We seem to be experiencing political stagnation, but at the same time crises are mounting: an economic crisis, a housing crisis, and a climate crisis. Each of those requires radical, decisive action. ○

○ / ○ / JK: My advice is to follow the example of the former architects of Warsaw and the contemporary architects of Syria and Ukraine. Instead of debating a complicated crisis, let's ask ourselves what we would do if the crisis ended tomorrow. Are we ready for a crisis-free tomorrow? Do we know what we want? The problem we have is not with the crisis but with our own will: we have forgotten what kind of future we wish for.

We have become so focused on the problems that we cannot imagine the alternatives. Perhaps the most important lesson from past and present extreme situations is that we should not take anything for granted, not even crises. You never really know what will happen tomorrow. We can lose everything – and we can create anything. ●

GILLY KARJEVSKY
ROSARIO TALEVI

Floating ~~University~~ Berlin: Natureculture Learning Site

A Soft and Caring Infrastructure

When thinking about urban infrastructure, we tend to think about essential facilities that make cities livable, such as roads, sewage treatment, or electrical grids. Ever-present yet overlooked, these are systems that are typically only noticed when they break down: power cuts, water shortages, traffic jams. Some of these infrastructural facilities were built decades ago as monofunctional entities that serve one particular purpose and, as a result, exist today as isolated and enclosed chunks of space within the urban fabric. They are planned by the state, built and managed by expert technicians, and are largely inaccessible to the public.

Today, urban infrastructures have become complex and messy. They can be seen as much more than just old pipes, cables, and containers. Urban infrastructures are deeply entangled with the landscape and the biodiversity of the environment in which they intervene. This entanglement is further complicated by the fact that urban infrastructures are traditionally sites of expertise. These infrastructures appear difficult to read and, as a result, impossible to alter.

But what happens when an urban infrastructural space is opened up – its function hybridized and its use collectivized? What protocols, routines, schedules and choices manifest when an urban infrastructure is infused with care: softened and layered with diverse meanings? Can these new circumstances transform urban infrastructures into spaces for commoning and platforms for public debates?

A soft and caring infrastructure collaborates with the existing environment and its agents. Such is the case of the Floating ~~University~~ in Berlin[1]. The site was designed in the early 1930s as a rainwater retention basin to serve the Tempelhof airfield and adjacent avenues, and it was encased in concrete after the Second World War by the US Army. Today, it remains as a fully functioning water infrastructure, holding and diverting rainwater into the city's canal system. Buried eight meters beneath street level, the basin is also surrounded by a "Gartenkolonie" – an allotment or community garden – and is almost invisible to passersby.

From the time of its construction in 1930 to its activation in 2018, the basin was closed off to the public. Yet over the course of its many secluded decades, a diverse range of animals, plants, and algae took root and gave birth to a unique landscape: a man-made environment reclaimed by nature, forming what Gilles Clément describes as a third landscape, which includes sites that are "left behind (délaissé) urban or rural sites, transitional spaces, neglected land (friches), swamps, moors, peat bogs, but also roadsides, shores, railroad embankments, etc." [2]

After Tempelhof airport was decommissioned in 2008, the city's redevelopment plan proposed building over the airfield and relocating the neighboring rainwater infrastructure. This would have transformed the 22,500-square-meter city-owned piece of land occupied by the basin into a valuable, profitable asset in Berlin's real estate portfolio. However, the Tempelhof referendum of 2014 saw Berliners vote against any kind of construction on the airfield. The result of this referendum not only protected the unique inner-city hybrid green space (Tempelhofer Feld) but also provided protection for the basin. ○

Floating ~~University~~ Berlin, rainwater retention basin
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photo: Lena Giovanazzi

○ / ○ **As part of ongoing cultural activities on and around Tempelhof airport, the architecture group raumlabor initiated the activation of the rainwater basin site in 2018. Having been involved with public action groups around the airfield as well as cultural collaborations, such as the 2012 "The World Is Not Fair Fair" with the HAU theatre, raumlabor wanted to open up this unique and hidden site for all Berlin residents to use and enjoy. They reimagined the site as an "Off-shore Campus for Cities in Transformation." From April to September 2018, the Floating ~~University~~ invited varied constellations of students, professors, summer schools, and self-organized groups, mainly from the design and art fields, to develop their own curricula and experiment on and with the site.**

Aside from inviting institutions to free themselves from their own rigid and often restrictive structures, the open program engaged with the general public by offering a wide range of activities, including theatre performances, BMX riding, and bee-keeping workshops.

The Birth of Floating ~~University~~ e.V.

The founding year of the Floating ~~University~~ saw a diverse range of visitors involved to varying degrees with the activity on site, creating a unique social and environmental ecosystem. Like an orchestra without a conductor, this apparent chaos not only encouraged diversity but, more importantly, allowed the unexpected and the unplanned to emerge. Moreover, the program consolidated a network of practitioners who, towards the end of 2018, decided to continue the experiment by transitioning from a "temporary" project to an association: Floating ~~University~~ e.V. The Floating ~~University~~ was registered as a non-profit with an elected board and monthly assemblies where all members have an equal voice.

1 In this article, !we" is used interchangeably to refer to both the authors (Gilly and Rosario, curators of Climate Care and founding members of the Floating e.V.) and to the whole of the Floating ~~University~~ association: some 56 members to date. We – the authors – choose to keep this distinction opaque, as the narration of the Floating is a messy nonlinear affair, composed of texts and perspectives as diverse as the site of floating itself

2 "The Third Landscape, an undetermined fragment of the Planetary Garden, designates the sum of the space left over by man to landscape evolution – to nature alone." See Gilles Clément, Manifesto of the Third Landscape (Brussels: TEH, 2022), https://teh.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/TEH-Publication-Manifesto-of-ThirdLandscape-145x225mm-2022-WEB-Spreads.pdf

This transition from a temporary intervention to a long-term engagement demanded a profound shift in our constitution as a self-organized group. Designed as a permanently ongoing process, our association involved radically revising routines and habits of being and doing: decision-making processes were made more transparent, different types of labor were de-hierarchized (from cleaning the toilet or writing a contract, to building a bench or giving a lecture), and budget sessions were made participatory. ○

The term "~~University~~," we learned, is a protected term – you can't just call yourself a "~~university~~." As a temporary art project, it was no problem, but as a registered educational entity we posed a threat to the formal educational system. We were forced to formally drop the word ~~university~~ from all legal documentation. However, still keen to challenge the institutional narrative, we decided to use the strikethrough (~~University~~) in all other instances: online, in print, on site, etc. Our contested relationship with the word and its associations thus remain visible.

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○ / **It was precisely this new legal structure that caught the attention of the Berlin authorities. Shortly after consolidating the association as a registered voluntary association under German law, whose foundational statute declares that the association's main purpose is the promotion of the general public through education, we were subject of an inquiry by the Berlin Senate of Education. The letter we received read: "I hereby notify you that the use of the word '~~University~~' without being entitled to do so under Berlin state law (Section 123 Berlin Higher Education Act) or under the law of another state or country is a misdemeanor under Section 125, Paragraph 1, No. 1 Berlin Higher Education Act, punishable by a fine of up to €100,000.00." [3]**

Practices and Pedagogies

Today, Floating e.V continues to grow as a site-symbiotic organization where heterogeneous interests translate into projects, interventions, events, and installations. We organize in groups that work on specific tasks and topics driven by interest and desires – or what we also like to call "Fields of Knowledge and Action." Among other activities, the association looks at how to create an economy onsite and how to develop its city-wide network both with the community and the political decision-makers affecting the site. We spend time together attending to all aspects of the Floating site, including maintenance and design of new architectures, events, learning programs, communications, and gardening.[4] A large number of the academic and artistic programs that emerge on site are bounded by loose instructions and infrastructures and emphasize open intentions and frames of work. ○

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Floating ~~University~~, walking in the rainwater retention basin
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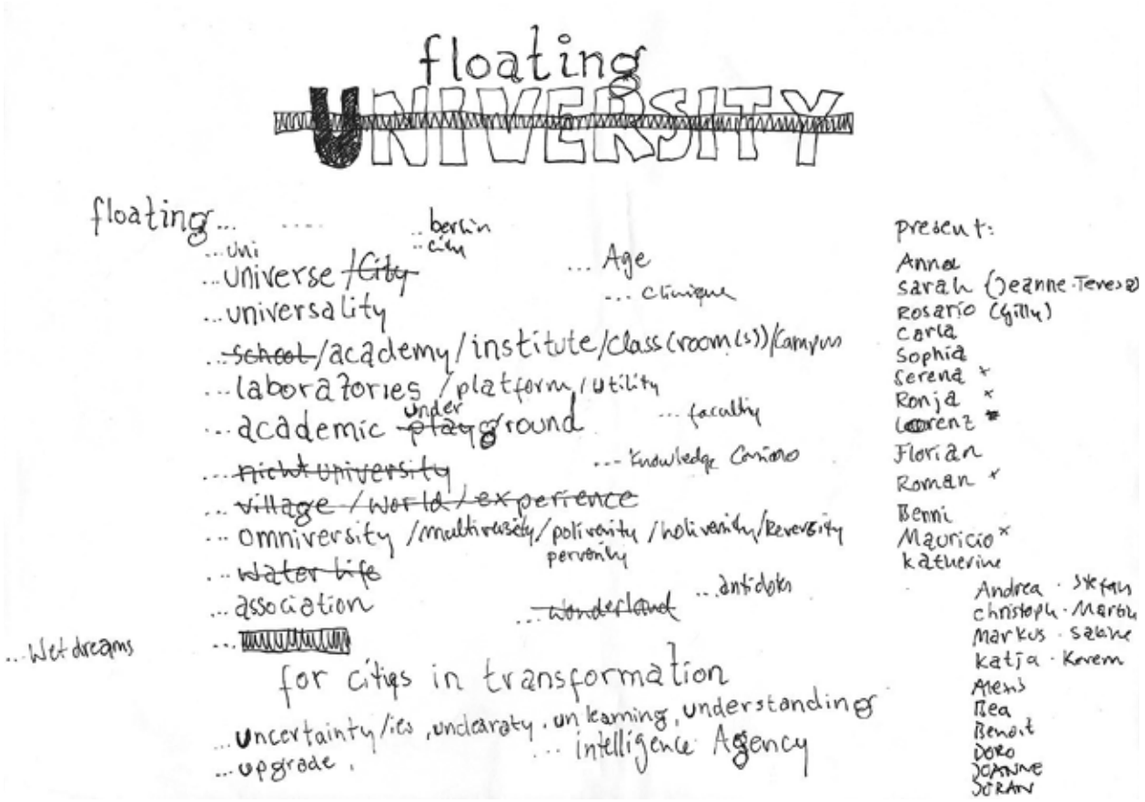
photo: Lena Giovanazzi



FLOATING ~~UNIVERSITY~~ BERLIN

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Floating ~~University~~-no-more
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photo: Benjamin Foerster Baldenius

○ / ○ / Curiosity is a driving pedagogical tool. We observe, mimic, try things out, and engage. The very nature of the site demands exchanges with others, both human and nonhuman. Nonverbal signifiers often replace spoken or written instructions. A perfect example of these forms of exchange is the rubber boots lying around everywhere. The boots have no signs or directions. People simply wear them to step into the water.

It is self-explanatory, but it also requires another form of being curiously active and willing to embody the site through one's own tacit experiences. The physical act of lifting a watering can make us aware of how much water is used to flush a toilet. On days when the site is inundated with heavy rain, we monitor the rising water level until the site becomes untenable or flooded completely; in these moments, we learn to experience rain as a volume of water as opposed to an event with a specific length of time.

In 2019, following the establishment of the association and responding to emerging international climate movements such as Fridays for Futures and Extinction Rebellion, the festival program "Climate Care" sought to address climate breakdown through a curriculum for urban practice. The program was designed to provide ideas and methodologies – theories and practices – through which groups and individuals could address climate challenges.

Through the Climate Care festival, Floating ~~University~~ was reimagined as a "Natureculture Learning Site." We borrowed the idea of Natureculture from Donna Haraway, [5] who argues for the dissolution of the chasm between humans and Nature (with a capital N, objectified and othered). [6] Following this term, we focused on learning as a form of living, understanding each action we took in the asin as a learning process. We invited others to learn with us and to acknowledge our relations with the site and how we cohabitate with its many living forms. It is in this approach that Floating ~~University~~ situates its mission: to open, soften, maintain, and take care of this unique public urban infrastructure, its human culture, and its multispecies over-layers, while bringing nondisciplinary, radical, and collaborative programs to the public.

3 Original German: "Hiermit teile ich Ihnen mit, dass die Nutzung des Wortes „~~University~~!, ohne dazu nach Berliner Landesrecht (Paragraph 123 Berliner Hochschulgesetz) oder nach dem Recht eines anderen Bundeslandes oder Landes berechtigt zu sein, gemäß Paragraph 125 Abs. 1 Nr. 1 Berliner Hochschulgesetz eine Ordnungswidrigkeit darstellt, die mit einer Geldbuße in Höhe von bis zu 100.000,00 € geahndet werden kann."

4 For more information about the spatial experiments, programs, and processes at Floating e.V, visit: https://floatingberlin.org/site/.

5 "This concept is created by Donna Haraway in The Companion Species Manifesto (2003) in order to write the necessary entanglement of the natural and the cultural, the bodily and the mind, the material and the semiotic, etcetera. 'Naturecultures' offers us an important route to rewrite these modernist oppositions in such a way that rather than representing parts of the world, a transcription with the world is being proposed. Concepts thus do not capture or mirror what is 'out there', but are fully immersed in a constantly changing reality." See Jussi Parikka, "New Materialism: Naturecultures in Utrecht," March 21, 2011, https://jussiparikka.net/2011/03/21/ new-materialism-naturecultures-in-utrecht.

6 For more on the topic, we suggest Tim Ingold, *The Appropriation of Nature: Essays on Human Ecology and Social Relations* (Manchester: Manchester ~~University~~ Press, 1986); Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard ~~University~~ Press, 2013); or Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (London: Verso, 2019).

Climate Care

In the 1990s, Joan Tronto introduced the concept of "care" into political philosophy, arguing for care as a basis for radical political judgments and the future cornerstone for a revitalized democracy.[7] The ethics of care challenge us to construct social relations and systems based on relational and situational morality, beyond abstract or universal notions of justice. These theories and practices of care[8] offer ways of relating and living, of perceiving and making, both as a society and as individuals engaged in mutual responsibility, attentiveness, and responsiveness. [9]

From this perspective, the ethics of care offers us an applicable set of ideas and alternative social norms to establish pathways for support, trust and, conviviality, promoting diversity, polyvocality, and respect for each other's differences.

Climate Care, the biannual ten-day festival we curate, takes on this definition and set of values and extends it to the diverse, complex, and evocative site of the Floating ~~University~~. The questions the festival engages with include: How might we care daily for our earth, ourselves, our community, and our education? What kind of infrastructure could we create at the Floating ~~University~~ in order to help practices of care at different scales? How do those practices draw on and relate to the physical surroundings and the environment? How do we hold space and situate sites for the complexity of our moment?

The first edition of Climate Care (2019) explored the interplay between ecology, pedagogies, and ethics of care. The second edition of Climate Care (2021) critically explored the notion of rewilding, questioning both the biological and ethical implications of this intervention at micro and macro levels.

During Climate Care, artists, thinkers, scientists, activists, and designers are invited to propose educational modules that encourage embodied and tacit knowledge to emerge from experiences on site. From compost making, experimentation with bio-materials, and the construction of urban hives, to weather writing and "tuning-in" methods, the festival urges participants to look at practices of care on a planetary scale and explore the concept of environmental personhood within the basin itself.

Natura Basina

It is simple to see how our presence has been beneficial for the diverse life forms on site. Look at the edges of the buildings, and you will see plants growing along them in greater numbers than in the open center of the basin. By slowing the water down, our disturbances – in the forms of temporary and mobile architectures, walking, growing edible plants, studying this site – have supported the build-up of sediment in the basin. ○

○ / ○ When water slows down, sediment (particles of sand, silt, and clay) falls out of it. In this sediment, plant roots can take hold and create habitats for frogs to procreate, baby ducks to be born, and foxes to hunt. The plants also slow the water down, enabling more sediment to build up and more plants to grow. The cycle is co-constituting. Algae are another entity in the basin that contributes to the build-up of the mud. After floods, algae often bloom in thick mats. When the water drains out of the basin into the Landwehrkanal and Spree River, the algae dry up and integrate into the mud as organic matter, broken down by microorganisms.

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Floating – areas of knowledge – actions – or – workgroups
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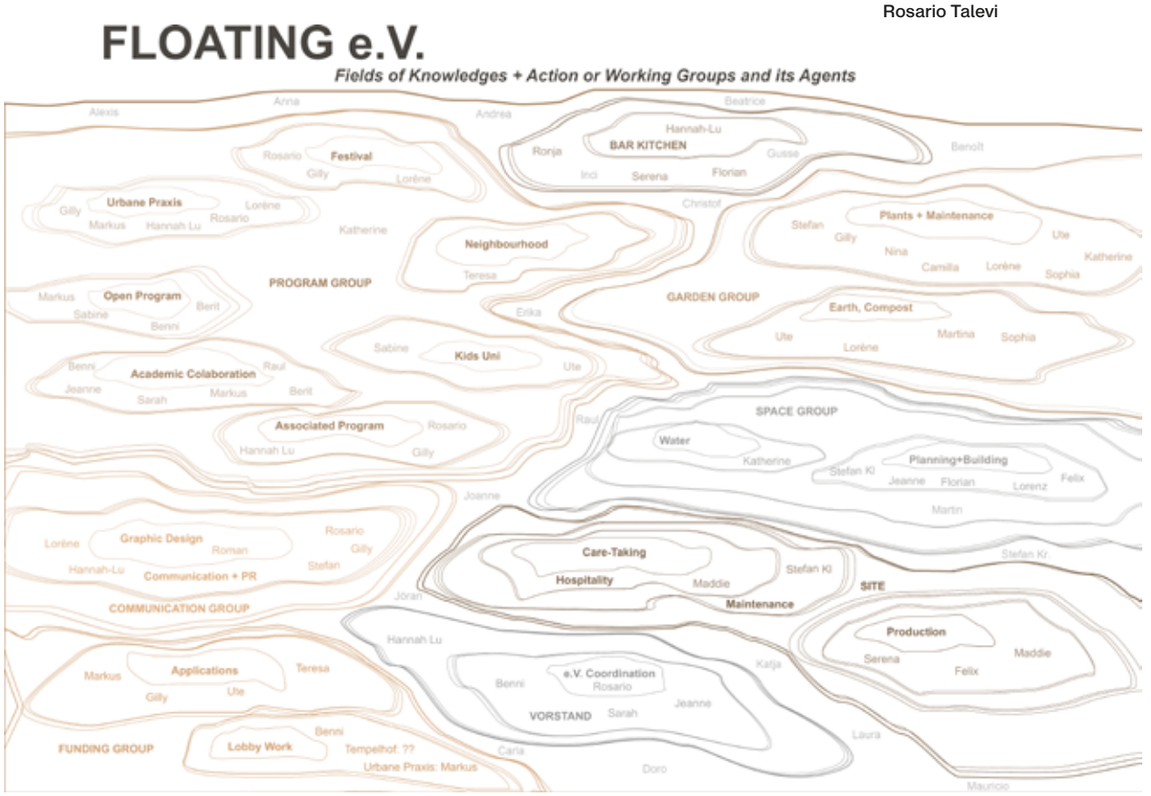
drawing: Lorene Blanche, Rosario Talevi



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Climate Care Festival
—
photo Constanze Flamme

→
Becoming Pattern, Valentina Karga, Marjetica Potrč
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photo: Constanze Flamme

The mud you see in the basin is a product of our disturbances, working in tandem with the reed plants, time, algae, and the original engineering of the basin as a holding place for water when floods come. The cattail reed beds have tripled in size since our inhabitation of the site. We see new plants taking hold and old ones multiplying. Young baby willow trees take root in the center of the concrete basin.

We believe this wetland is in the process of transitioning into a grassland and eventually a forest. This habitat is shifting away from aquatic plants and towards grasses, purslane, and willow trees that are now showing up. Human disturbances and interventions, such as Floating e.V.'s activities and passivities, working in tandem with the self-will of the burgeoning grassland could, one day, become a small, naturally generated forest – a very rare thing in Berlin.

From Wild to Rewild

At Floating, we advance an understanding of the site informed by Gammon's "cluster concept" [10]: one that holds the site, its biological diversity, the association, and its cultural diversity, as well as the Berlin context, all in one bag. To be onsite is to be connected to these larger contexts. To think of rewilding in this specific city is to allude to the empty spaces of postwar, post-Wall Berlin, where unprecedentedly large areas of free space meant subversive botanical and cultural movements could grow in the cracks: a period known as the "wild years." This wildness was the result of a particular set of conditions: a sudden regime collapse, an absence of a consolidated state, a city in a slow process of reunification, and an incredible amount of space – from Second World War bomb sites to empty apartments abandoned by fleeing East Germans. Wildness was also what characterized the unique subcultures and nightlife that emerged exploring, seizing, and inhabiting those spaces.

While the party was going wild, so was a neoliberal urban development agenda. In order to resolve the city's debt issues and urgent need for capital, 14 million square meters of Berlin's public land and empty real estate were sold between 2001 and 2013 for a total of €2.4 billion. As a result, free spaces in the city have become increasingly scarce, and the number of displaced residents has soared. In response, multiple citizen-led movements have emerged. For example, Stadt Neudenken successfully demanded more transparent and sustainable urban development policy from Berlin's House of Representatives. Kotti&Co. and its gezekondu began as a protest camp to fight rising rents and later became a local landmark at Kottbusser Tor. The successful Tempelhof referendum prevented the city administration from unfolding their development plans. And Haus der Statistik is currently being developed through an unprecedented collaboration between civic and state actors to collectively invent its future.

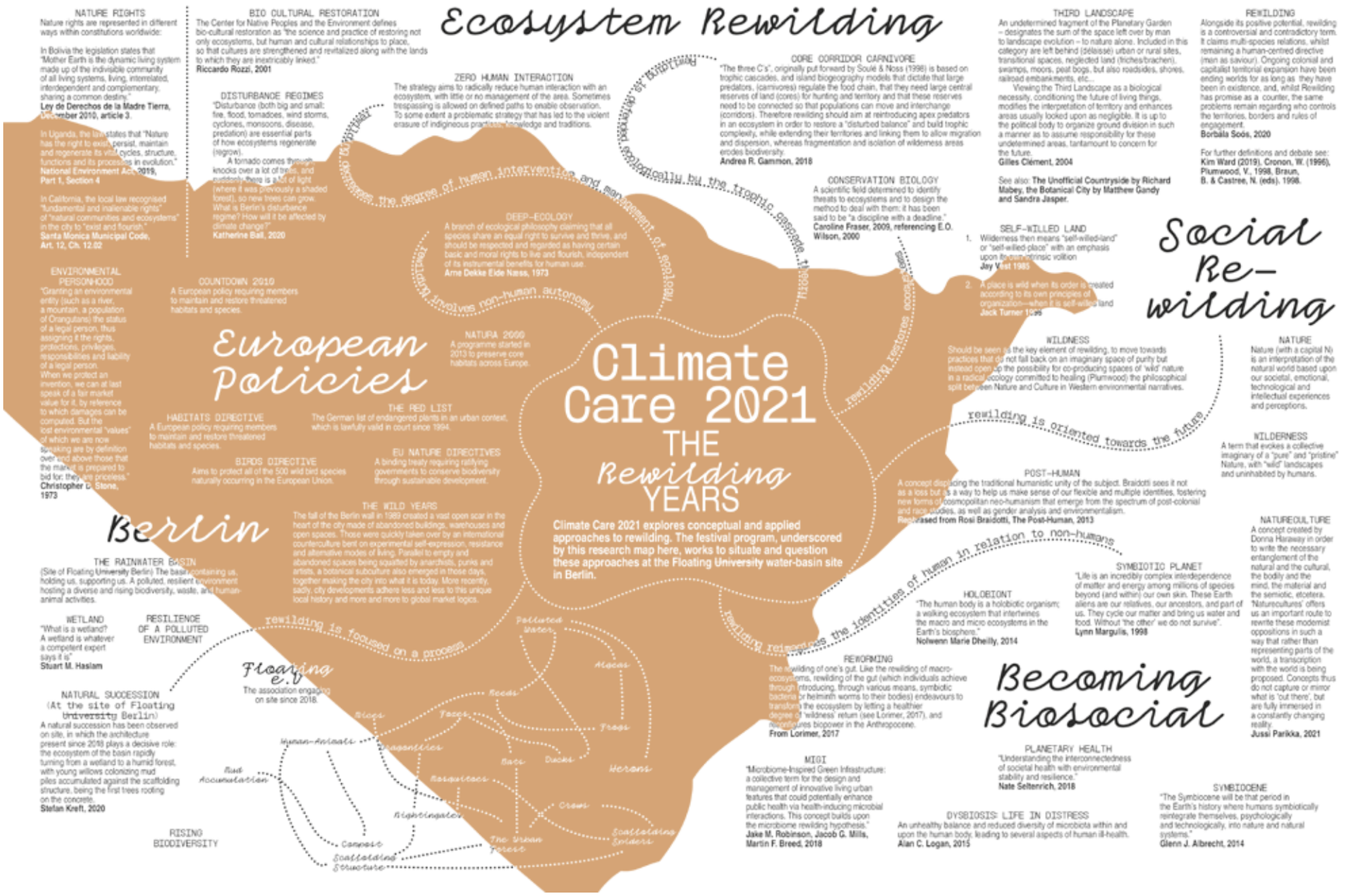
Despite these efforts, the feeling remains: Berlin has lost its wildness. Wild urban lives have been tamed by higher rents; an absence of a caring policy for public

7 Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

8 In addition to a long list of readers and writings looking at feminist ethics and theory in architecture and spatial practice since the 1970s, we also look at long-term projects, such as the traveling exhibition and published book *Critical Care - Architecture for a Broken Planet* by Elke Krasny and Angelika Fitz (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), as well as the Bartlett commission on Ethics in the Built Environment, led by Prof. Jane Rendell since 2015; see https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartleO/about-us/our-values/ethics-built-environment.

9 Attentive, responsible, competent, and responsive are the four ethical elements Joan Tronto first proposed in her seminal work *An Ethic of Care*, to which she would later add plurality, communication, trust, and respect.

10 "I advance rewilding as a cluster concept: that is, a concept of several overlapping aspects that lacks jointly necessary and sufficient conditions. Conceptualised in this way, 'rewilding' as a term can encompass the various meanings already in circulation, meanings that are necessary to understand the cultural interest in rewilding as an emerging environmental phenomenon." See Andrea R. Gammon, "The Many Meanings of Rewilding: An Introduction and the Case for a Broad Conceptualization," Environmental Values 27, no. 4 (2018): 331–350.



lands has resulted in enclosures and privatization. Profit-driven city-making has displaced the wildness and ushered in waves of gentrification. ○

○ / ○ / **We want to connect with those wild years and reflect on what Berlin and its inhabitants can learn from them. Can we reclaim wildness and rewilding as an attitude to shape our cities and our lives? Can qualities such as openness, otherness, togetherness, joyfulness, and playfulness – without romanticizing the past – bring us together to foster bonds and interconnectedness on both the local and the planetary scale?**

Most recently, rewilding has been introduced in cities' Green New Deals as a strategy to help downsize the production of CO 2 and mitigate climate breakdown. Sometimes these efforts include interventions such as green envelopes (roofs and façades), vertical farming, wildlife corridors, urban gardens, the planting of trees, or just allowing !nature" to regenerate. These are welcome efforts, but rewilding should not just be

understood and implemented in a reductionist way. Rewilding efforts should be always paired with social and climate justice. Rewilding is a plea for the systemic changes they require, rather than a solution-oriented approach that continues to drive capitalism even if it is tinted green.

With Climate Care: The Rewilding Years (2021), we aimed to reclaim some of the qualities and lessons of Berlin's wild years, and to claim "rewilding" as a careful practice, before it becomes another buzzword devoid of meaning.

The Future of the Site

Recently, we have learned of the plans to "re-naturalize" the basin, proposed by our landlord Tempelhof GmbH, the state-owned company that manages the site. This means the environment enjoyed by the life forms currently occupying the site will be dramatically altered. For example, the thick concrete floor will most likely be removed and replaced with a porous layer to allow incoming polluted rainwater to filter and trickle into the ground. This kind of spatial transformation will deeply affect both the biodiversity onsite and our ability to fill it with cultural and educational programming. With such plans for refurbishment underway, the future of the site after the intervention is unclear.

However, the process is still open and has the potential to be defined collaboratively. Could the renaturalizing process explore the relationship between urban nature and urban infrastructures by establishing a dialogue between artists, academics, engineers, gardeners, and technocrats to prototype different possible systems on site? Could this initiate a dialogue where artificial divisions between these forms of practice – artistic, academic, and scientific; civic and governmental – are dismantled?

A lobby group formed in the association is seeking to establish dialogues with the landlord, local politicians and the wider community around the basin. While the unique model and project that Floating ~~University~~ offers is widely recognized, celebrated, and awarded within architectural, academic, and cultural contexts, the reality of urban development – its technocratic and its growth-driven character – remains in stark contrast to the intentions set forward by the association. ○

○ / As a result, the association has not been invited to take an active part in the upcoming transformation process, despite our repeated requests. The site of the basin remains highly contested, with many political players from the district pushing for different plans, ranging from recreation or sports grounds to social housing or a park. If these plans pan out, development of the site would reverse it to its mono-functional origin, losing sight of the enormous learning potential of hybridized uses of sites within the city.

We believe an urban transformation process is a learning process and therefore should include social and pedagogical components that allow for legibility, assimilation, and participation. The basin's renaturalizing process holds the potential for an urgently needed conversation around eco-social renewal of urban infrastructures in ways that expose how cities are made and maintained, and how they respond to the current climate breakdown. ●

↖
Climate Care PROGRAM – research map
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drawing: Jeanne Astrup Chavaux, Gilly Karjevsky

↑
Excavators working in the rainwater retention basin
—
photo: Jeanne Astrup-Chauvaux

DOROTA
JĘDRUCH

We are all anarchists (or we should be)

Self-organisation and anarchitecture

Mutual aid

One of the pillars of anarchism is the self-organization of human communities, in its various meanings: as a practice adapted to circumstances, as the spontaneous action of people gathered for various reasons outside the official system, and as a theoretical recipe for how a society should function without the state or other hierarchical structures of power. Theorists of anarchism have paid much attention to cooperation between people. In the classic foundational text *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902), Peter Kropotkin diagnosed solidarity tendencies in the human population that are analogous to examples of cooperation in nature. In opposition to (or in addition to) natural and social Darwinism, which are built on the notions of competition, natural selection, domination, and elimination, Kropotkin points to numerous examples of mutual cooperation and support in the natural world and in human populations – beginning with prehistoric communities, to medieval cities, to the nineteenth-century labour movement.

Mutual aid ideas are continued by mutualism. This current of anarchism owes its name to the principle of mutual benefit existing in nature in the form of cooperation between various species. Mutualism promotes collaboration between independent producers united in associations as part of a fair exchange of goods and services based on favourable agreements regulating mutual relations. This is possible thanks to loans granted by the national bank – a , which is a non-profit institution by definition in this system. Mutualism does not discourage private property as long as it does not lead to exploitation and domination; nor does it promote violent upheaval. It assumes that a community of free associations would gradually, naturally and democratically relinquish the state and central power structures[1]. ○

Anarchitecture

Similar observations apply to the phenomenon called anarchitecture – anarchist architecture. Seemingly, it has little in common with traditionally understood architecture – the most political of the arts – which is cost and energy intensive, requires precise professional knowledge, and is focused on the dominant figures of the Designer (usually male) and the Ordering Party (also male). Modernist architecture in particular – with its associations with the liberal system, the cult of the superior plan, the paternalistic architect and social engineering, in both centralized and authoritarian systems of communist countries – seems to be in opposition to bottom-up, voluntary organization and direct democracy, thanks to which the user becomes the author or co-author of his own living environment. In the search for democratic architecture models, modernism and the tradition of top-down planning have usually been rejected; instead, these pursuits have turned to a different type of construction: to vernacular architecture, which is non-professional and based on local building traditions; to examples of self-made construction in communities functioning outside the mainstream of urban policies – slum districts, favelas, homeless encampments, settlements related to alternative forms of living, homes in allotment gardens or spontaneously created playgrounds for children. Anarchist tendencies have been noticed in projects that assumed the participation of residents – both in the design, and later in various forms of co-management of the already built living environment, including the cooperative movement and the possibility of further free transformation of ready-made housing estates. Activities in the city space can also be anarchic in nature: squatting, urban guerrilla gardening, ephemeral architecture related to the organization of mass protests – all of these serve to undermine the existing power relations. There are many projects in which architects are not involved at all. Some are temporary and ad hoc, while others arise out of grim necessity – not as a result of the conscious choice of the users. They do, however, offer a kind of alternative to centrally managed city designs, whether liberal or socialist.

Western end of the Byker Wall housing estate in Newcastle, designed by Ralph Erskine
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photo: Lawsonrob, Wikimedia Commons, public domain

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Waldspirale (Woodlands spiral) is a housing complex in Darmstadt, designed by Viennese artist Friedensreich Hundertwasser, implemented by architect Heinz M. Springmann and bauverein AG Darmstadt
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photo: Norbert Nagel / Wikimedia Commons CCA-SA 3.0 U

○ / ○ / **Without denying anarchist persons their fundamental role in building resistance situations and structures, it can be observed that mutual aid and self-organization go beyond the framework of the postulates of the anarchist movement and have been described much more broadly as social mechanisms functioning in the world of people and the world of nature; under favourable conditions, they can ensure the establishment of relations of peaceful cooperation.**

Thus, anarchism would be possible without anarchists and anarchist doctrines, although it is their determination that furnishes these actions with a more permanent sense and theoretical motivation, and it also allows them to be seen in a context that is broader than the current one.

1 "Mutualizm" [Mutualism] entry, Anarcho-Biblioteka, https://pl.anarchistlibraries.net/library/mutalizm-jest-bardziej-umiarkowana-czescia-kolektywistycznego-anarchizmu-oparta-na-ideach-pierr (accessed: 15 May 2023).

Despite the huge diversity of the circumstances of the creation, motivation, and character of buildings, the forms of anarchitectural projects seem to be surprisingly similar. Polycentric structures dominate. They accumulate layer by layer, they grow organically, they use found materials and recycling; they are striking in their multiplicity of textures, shapes and colours, and with their ingenuity in reusing ready-made objects.

A project constructed for IBA 1986 in Berlin: Wohnregal at Admiralstrasse 16. Designed by Kjell Nillund, Cristof Puttfarken, Peter Sturzebecher
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photo: Gunnar Klack / Wikimedia Commons CCA BY-SA 4.0

Although the creators of anarchist buildings subordinate them to the aesthetics of austerity and randomness, we often end up with carefully decorated objects because anarchitecture also uses the strategies of street art, murals, typography, and the spontaneous and organically growing creativity of the users, both professional artists and amateurs. This participatory logic is rooted in a building model based on a solid skeleton that is designed by an architect and then filled with modular blocks whose functions are subordinated to the needs of the users. It is dominated by a sense of multiplicity that is adequate to the individualism of the inhabitants of the building, with their different tastes and own ways of using the space. Surprisingly, even buildings in whose creation professional architects participated – from the Dadaist Hundertwasser to the minimalist and sophisticated Aravena – are also associated with "architecture without an architect": colourful, ludic, escaping subordination and constraints, anarchic in their creative freedom, and dropping the rules of dogmatic composition; they are "plurality in plurality". Arbitrary and unauthorised construction that is considered anarchic has fascinated both modernists (as an archaic model of functionality) and anti-modernists (as liberation from the dogmatics of the modernist plan).

The term "anarchitecture" is believed to have been coined in the 1970s by a group of intermedia artists in New York. These included Laurie Anderson, Tina Girouard, Carol Goodden, Suzanne Harris, Jene Highstein, Bernard Kirschenbaum, Richard Landry, Richard Nonas, and Gordon Matta-Clark. Indeed, they adopted the name The Anarchitecture Group, and in 1974 that was the title of their exhibition. The members of this group always acted anonymously and collectively. They offered a critical commentary on the modernist model of postwar architecture, its inertia and lack of susceptibility to change, as well as its close links with the neoliberal order.

It is difficult to precisely define the meaning of the word "anarchitecture". In a way, it works like a filter: depending on the intentions, users can screen all sorts of case examples through it. A review of publicists' opinions shows how multithreaded the understanding of anarchitecture is. In Polish literature, this concept appeared – perhaps for the first time – in 2002. It was used by Rafał Górski in an article for the anarchist magazine "A-tak"[2] – a synthetic presentation of examples of buildings constructed with various forms of self-organization and user participation. However, he did not explicitly define these buildings' relationship with doctrinal anarchism.

Górski remarked that the "anarchitecture" featured in the title of his article was initially a pejorative commentary on the construction of a social centre for medical students called La Mémé[3] (the whole investment project consisted of dormitories, restaurants, administrative buildings, a theatre, a chapel with a parsonage, a sports facility, a school, and a kindergarten). It was built according to a design by the office of Lucien and Simone Kroll in the years 1970–1976 at the Catholic University of Louvain in Woluwe-Saint-Lambert, Brussels. The project grew out of criticism of international modernism in the spirit of Team Ten (Kroll was a representative of the group), but also from the mood of the student revolt of 1968. The architect was invited to the project by the student community, which regarded the official plans to redevelop the campus with reluctance; ultimately, the building complex was created in close design cooperation, that is, it was co-designed together with its future users. The Krolls proposed a modular structure based on a type of structural frame into which they freely installed the modules of individual rooms. Responding to the specific needs of individuals, they also coordinated the discussion and selection of solutions. During the preparation of the mock-up model of the entire compound, the participants of the design process

> "moved pieces of sponge around. When disagreements broke out or one group became dogmatic and stubborn, Kroll reorganized the team so that everyone could see all the problems until a possible solution emerged. Only then did he draw plans and sections, on the basis of which construction could begin.[4]

The result of this creative process is a complex of buildings with irregular structures and dancing rhythms of windows and glazing with various sizes and colours of joinery on the façades that are remarkable for their variety of materials, textures and elements used. Critics considered it an illustration of "anarchy" not only in terms of the unusual organization of the design process but also in terms of the ultimate form that had been achieved. The lack of the superior authority of the designer and the replacement of a top-down plan with a process of organic and collective composition led to the creation of a complex of buildings that is devoid of aesthetic "order" but is pluralistic instead.

For his second flagship example of anarchitecture, Górski chose Byker Wall in Newcastle, designed by Ralph Erskine. The implementation of this project lasted from

2 R. Górski, *Anarchitektura*, quoted from: http://teoriaarchitektury.blogspot.com/2011/08/anarchitektura.html (accessed: 15 May 2023).
3 In the quoted text, erroneously referred to as La Merne.
4 R. Górski, *Anarchitektura*, op. cit.
5 Ibid.
6 J. Urbański, *Odzyskać miasto. Samowolne osadnictwo, skłoting, anarchitektura*, Oficyna Bractwa Trojka, 2005, https://pl.anarchistlibraries.net/library/jaroslaw-urbanski-odzyskac-miasto (accessed: 15 May 2023).
7 Urbański refers here to the texts by Marcin Mateusz Kołakowski, published in the "Architekturza & Biznes" monthly in the early 2000s: *Cywilizacja bez domu – cywilizacja bez sensu*, "Architektura & Biznes" 2004, No. 12; *Re(e)wolucyjny krok ku wodzie*, "Architektura & Biznes" 2004, No. 10; *Miejska rewolucja wolnych ludzi*, "Architektura & Biznes" 2004, No. 5.

Salvation Mountain at Slab City, California
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photo: Taylorandayumi / Wikimedia Commons CC BY 2.0

Slab City, California
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photo: Tuchodi / Wikimedia Commons CC BY 2.0

1969 to 1981. The uniqueness of the task resulted from the belief that it is possible to revitalize a neglected district of the city without getting rid of the local community (typically, such projects assume the resettlement of residents, and the district undergoes gentrification). The design of this housing estate was consulted with future residents (which is usually impossible at the initial stage of the project because future tenants are generally not known at that time). The architect officiated in an abandoned funeral parlour that he shared with a garden centre. This place, where discussions and consultations were held on the emerging project, blended in and became part of the everyday life of the local population. Erskine started by building a small section of the estate to give future users a chance for further consultation based on the existing prototype.

The review of examples of anarchitecture proposed by Górski primarily concerned projects created in the 1960s and 1970s on the wave of cultural changes of 1968. He considered the activities of ARAU (Atelier de Recherche et d'Action Urbaine) in Brussels after 1969; he selected projects related to the counterculture movement (including the well-known hippie settlement known as Drop City, with houses in the shape of geodesic domes) and self-propelled construction using recycled materials: waste and fragments of old boats, welded car bodies, barrels, bottles, tree houses, houses on wheels. He noticed some later examples of cohousing, as well as further experiments in the field of participation: Wohnregal, built in Berlin on the occasion of IBA 1986 (designed by Nylund, Puttfarken and Sturzebecher), and a block of flats in Malmö from 1991 (designed by Ivo Waldhör). In the conclusion of his text, he emphasized being interested in a certain "building philosophy", the primary goal of which is to save materials and create a community of residents around the construction and further functioning of houses. "What was typical of anarchitecture was the belief that a great wealth of construction and artistic inventions still remains hidden in the creativity of individuals and groups animated by a common thought that this activity has value, that it can contribute to shaping personality", he explained. For him, anarchitecture was "a verb, an 'action', not a set of correct prescriptions and rules. It gains value when it contributes to a direct relationship between the user and the dwelling, and between the home and the natural environment".[5] Unmistakably, in his article Górski included reflections on the form and aesthetics of this type of architecture, and he reconstructed the social circumstances related to the democratic process of its creation and functioning in as much detail as possible.

An even broader range of links between architecture and the anarchist movement was outlined by Jarosław Urbański.[6] In his view, anarchist tendencies in relation to planning policy and architecture go hand in hand with a critique of the technocratic modernist city and modernist architecture. Anarchism finds its justification in the fight for the city: in the revision of property relations, criticism of liberal or centralized governance, urban resistance, anti-eviction, grassroots movements, urban guerrilla schemes, self-organization, squatting. In addition to the examples of anarchitecture that appear in Górski's text (Kroll, Erskine, Wohnregal, Waldhör), Urbański lists Aranya Township at Indore (designed by Balkrishna Doshi, 1982), the works of Walter Segal, the Danish group N55,[7] as well as the activity of Pracownia Architektury Żywej (Studio of Living Architecture), run in the 1980s by Andrzej Janusz Korbel. The last example is particularly important as it shows the essential links between anarchism and pro-environmental, ecological ideas. Korbel attracted the attention of the author not only because he implemented ecological ideas, criticized architectural modernism, and remained sceptical about the neoliberal changes of the times of the Polish transformation. Urbański saw him as a theoretician of social networks – that is, systems of mutual assistance and activities that bring together members of communities that represent an alternative to the rules of the hierarchical, centralized power of state and business. "Working in a network means that a number of independent, equal and usually small groups come together to share knowledge, practice solidarity and act together simultaneously on many levels. The network expresses inner strength. […] Leadership, if needed, is a matter of momentary agreement, and it changes."[8] Therefore, rather than specific architectural solutions, Urbański cast as the main protagonist of his brochure a certain attitude of the architect towards the role of architecture in social life.

Mateusz Gierszon also wrote about anarchism in Poland.[9] His selection of projects that are interesting in the context of libertarian ideas also included designs by Kroll and Erskine; he additionally noticed Walter Segal and completed his picture of the participatory threads of Team Ten architecture with an analysis of Giancarlo di Carlo's projects. Relatively recently, he has also written about projects by John Habraken, Hassan Fathi, John Turner and the Technology Development Group, and he has mentioned Alejandro Aravena's projects, among others.

A review of Polish anarchist journalism on architecture shows that these authors were particularly interested in eclectic projects. They did not precisely determine the relationship between the discussed projects and the theories and practice of anarchism, nor the criteria for the selection of examples. They did not pay much attention to such determinations, perhaps because they were writing for members of the anarchist movement and they did not need an additional explanation to understand these connections and motivations. The points of reference for the quoted journalists are all those proposals in which

8 *Zielona antologia*, edited by A.J. Korbel, J. Tyrlik, Gliwice: Politechnika Śląska, Pracownia Architektury Żywej, Pracownia na Rzecz Wszystkich Istot, 1989, p. 68.

9 Including: M. Gierszon, *Metoda Segala. O wspólnotowym budownictwie mieszkaniowym*, Poznań: Oficyna Wydawnicza Trojka, 2021. Gierszon published his texts in his own online blog https://wieloryp.wordpress.com/, in the form of a cycle of articles in the "A-tak" journal in 2017–2020 (they are available online, titled *Architektura z perspektywy anarchistycznej*, https://pl.anarchistlibraries.net/library/mateusz-gierszon-architektura-z-perspektywy-anarchistycznej (accessed: 15 May 2023).

the element of participation appears (but the figure of the architect, coordinator and conductor of the design process is also constantly present), and all those experiments in which the design, construction, or use of completed buildings is combined with some form of self-government and associations of users or residents.

○ / ○ / Self-organization or grassroots democracy – indispensable elements of the anarchist attitude – are neither the only condition nor even the necessary condition for something to be classified as anarchitecture. After all, this trend includes buildings erected in more traditional frames. Anarchitecture does not always strive to create architecture: it is fulfilled both in recovering and reusing spaces and in building specific social relations or democratic co-decision procedures without erecting any buildings or structures (such is the case of cohousing or squatting movements).

ZAD (*zone à défendre*, zone to be protected) at Mormont hill near Éclépens and La Sarraz – the first such initiative in Switzerland; the goal was to stop the extension of the Holcim quarry nearby
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photo: Lahminiewski Lab / Wikimedia Commons CC BY 4.0

It seems that the texts quoted above, especially those by Górski and Urbański, were greatly influenced by the publications of Charles Jencks, some of whose works were published in Poland in the 1980s. Even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Polish readers had very limited access to foreign publications on architecture, and it so happened that highly polemical texts containing traces of interest in democratic attitudes in design were translated.[10] Jencks recognises the importance of anarchist traditions in the beginnings of avant-garde modernism: in the organization of teaching at the Bauhaus and in the concepts of Bruno Taut and Alvar Aalto. He started his discussion of the art of post-revolutionary Russia with a chapter devoted to the "activist tradition" in twentieth-century architecture: he referred to the movements of illegal squatter settlements, including the Peruvian *barriads* – settlements built spontaneously by residents and then quickly destroyed by the police. "When each one builds and destroys his own home according to his needs and wishes, and when the organization of services must be the result of popular initiative, the kind of brotherly affection foretold in mutualism doctrine develops"[11], he noted. In Jencks' writings of the late 1960s, references to anarchism seem something more than a history lesson. He seems to favour the model of architecture based on grassroots movements and self-organisation, as opposed to modernist social engineering that works for the advantage of the neoliberal order.

In the book's postscript, titled *Architecture and Revolution* (the title was a polemic with Le Corbusier and his appeal: "Architecture or revolution"), Jencks directly expressed his views. He mentions rare moments in the history of civilization when "forms of public life were conducive to free and open discussion of issues concerning the whole community". The benefits which stemmed from this included not only the obvious advantages of self-government – controlling decisions that affected everyone – but also extended to the realm of joys that now sound strange to our ears: "public happiness, the delight of public speaking to reveal one's identity, the joy of deliberating, sharing one's views with others and even with the opposition."[12] Referring directly to May 1968, Jencks enthusiastically recalls grassroots decision-making structures in the form of action committees. He saw in them the fruit of all popular revolutions (from the Paris Commune to the October Revolution). The last paragraph of the book is a manifesto of a return to architecture based on social trust: "If today [...] we are to have trustworthy architecture, it must find support in a popular revolution which results in a credible form of public life – the council system".[13] It does not seem likely that the council system in this surprising appeal for a new democratic ethics of architecture would refer to anarchist solutions, but it would

certainly applaud the disintegration of the existing system of power, not only of ossified models of government, but above all of the neoliberal order.

It is not a coincidence – or perhaps it might be, but nevertheless it is significant – that the criticism of modernism and the appeal for a return to democratic design appeared in Polish journalism under the influence of texts written by the leading critic of postmodernism. In retrospect, there is a feeling that the aesthetics of postmodernism in Poland accompanies the rather ultra-liberal transformations of the period of political transition. If anarchy affects the aesthetics of postmodernism in any way, it is only in the popular understanding, namely as the dominance of uncoordinated, unplanned, and extremely individualistic solutions, subordinated to imprecisely defined and poorly controlled market mechanisms. However, the awareness of anarchitecture in Poland accompanied precisely the postmodern questioning of the authoritarian modernist model. This was also noticed by Gierszon:

> In its explorations, the detailed, diverse and individualistic architecture associated with anarchism seems to be consistent with the mainstream postmodern reaction to the hegemony of modernism. However, postmodern architecture that professed to use an archetype – a form that is rooted in culture and comprehensible to all – in fact had shallow and speculative ways of bringing architecture back to broader social groups. [...] Although the libertarian critique of the combination of politics and architecture/urban planning was born parallel to postmodernism, in fact it came from completely different stances. First of all, the issue of the architectural form was of secondary importance because it was supposed to be the result of social relations – and it was those relations, manifested in the design and construction process, that were the most important.[14]

Postmodernism is a style of conservatism; it is the aesthetics of the free market and of elitist individualism; however, in the Polish debate on architecture – the debate on libertarian architecture and the rejection of modernist models – both trends ran in parallel. In my opinion, this is why activists have taken strong anti-modernist positions.

In the recent extensive publication (over sixty examples of the relationship between architecture and anarchism) Architecture and Anarchism: Building without Authority, British researcher Paul Dobraszczyk[15] presented an in-depth analysis of anarchitecture as a broad social trend that is not necessarily limited to the activities of anarchist groups. He defined anarchism rather broadly. He took into account its doctrinal diversity and pointed out that we are dealing with a common anarchist attitude rather than a theory that can be clearly catalogued.

Prinzessinnengärten in Berlin – an example of city gardening
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photo: Staffan Cederborg / Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 2.0

> All forms of anarchism are founded on self-organization or government from below. Often stemming from a place of radical scepticism of unaccountable authorities, anarchism favours bottom-up self-organization over hierarchy. It is not about disorder but about a different order that is based on the principles of autonomy, voluntary association, self-organisation, mutual aid and direct democracy.[16]

Dobraszczyk's text and the selection of the presented examples seem to be guided by the thought of the anarchist writer Colin Ward. After all,

> He always argued the values behind anarchism in action are rooted in the things we all do. [...] As part of his work, he often embraced everyday subjects such as community allotments, children's playgrounds, holiday camps, and housing cooperatives. He had a strong and optimistic view in anarchism as an always-present but often latent force in social life that simply needed nurturing to grow.[17]

10 Ch. Jencks, *Ruch nowoczesny w architekturze*, transl. A. Morawińska, H. Pawlikowska, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1987. [Modern Movements in Architecture] This is Jencks's doctoral thesis, defended in 1971. The echoes of the events of 1968 reverberate throughout the book.
11 Ibid., pp. 105–106.
12 Ibid., p. 512.
13 Ibid., p. 518.
14 M. Gierszon, *Metoda Segala...*, op. cit., pp. 30–31.
15 P. Dobraszczyk, *Architecture and Anarchism: Building without Authority*, London: Antepavilon, Paul Holberon Publishing, 2021.
16 Ibid, p. 11.
17 P. Dobraszczyk, *How anarchist architecture could help us build back better after COVID*, "The Conversation", 26 January 2022, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2022/jan/opinion-how-a-narchist-architecture-could-help-us-build-back-better-after-covid (accessed: 15 May 2023).

A broad understanding of anarchist practices allows Dobraszczyk to present a broad range of examples of anarchist architecture. He groups them around several leading themes: freedom, escape, necessity, protest, ecology, art, speculation, and participation. He discusses examples as diverse as the libertarian Christiania in Copenhagen, Auroville in India, the hippie Slab City in California, the ephemeral, democratically organized communities of big festivals like Burning Man or Rainbow Gatherings or, surprisingly enough, the religious Kumbh Mela festival. On the occasion of the escape theme, he mentions the free, grassroots aesthetics of British plotlands, the Nokken housing estate near Copenhagen, playgrounds designed by Carl Theodor Sørensen in the 1930s in Emdrup near Copenhagen, and camps associated with protests against neoliberal investment mechanisms, including the French ZAD (zone à défendre, zone to defend). He describes ecological buildings (the Street Farm activities in London in the 1970s, examples of urban gardening such as Prinzessinnengärten in Berlin) as well as the "architecture" of mass protests (such as the temporary protest camps at Tahir Square in Cairo in 2011, the Zuccotti during Occupy Wall Street in New York in 2011, and Extinction Rebellion in 2018, i.e., a series of protest actions in London in places dominated by car traffic).

The examples cited in the chapter on necessity are of an entirely different nature. Self-governance enforced by a community that is forced to remain on the margins of dominant economic and social relations should be treated differently than similar actions carried out by choice. Nevertheless, these examples also can be classified as anarchitecture because democratic solutions in terms of land management and examples of social solidarity are evidence of spontaneous cooperation between people in a situation of crisis and the absence of a superior authority. Among other examples, the author discusses "The Jungle" – an illegal camp of immigrants near Calais, brutally liquidated in 2016 by the police.

"Speculations" and "participation" both produce architecture that is close to the traditional sense of the word as they assume the necessity of the designer's participation and the creation of a unique "work". This set includes relatively obvious projects like Constant's New Babylon from 1958–1974, but also, somewhat less obviously, the digital space: from Minecraft to open source projects. Dobraszczyk supplemented the list of "classic" examples of participation known to us from texts by Polish journalists – projects by Giancarlo de Carlo, Lucien Kroll, Ralph Erskine, Walter Segal – with more recent ones, such as Granby Four Streets in Liverpool by the Assemble group from 2013, and Agrocité by the Paris atelier d'architecture autogerée, founded in 2016.

The publication ends with photos showing police officers taking down the ephemeral Antepavillon in 2021, an artistic installation associated with Extinction Rebellion activists that was built in London during the pandemic. The powerful picture at the end reveals, for the first time, the other side of the coin of anarchic actions – the oppressive forces that govern the liberal order of modern cities.

Certainly, not all examples chosen by Dobraszczyk concern doctrinally understood anarchism, and many may not refer to architecture as such (at least when understood as the implementation of a planned building), but they create a suggestive selection of activities related to democratically managed and organized space. Behind most of them are actions that are critical of the liberal vision of the city and that seek to revive broken ties with nature; they even provide examples of environmental activism.

Planned spatial order or self-organization

Self-organization, self-construction, and spontaneous architecture are not an experimental margin of modern construction but a real and perhaps also dominant phenomenon in the organization of the human living environment. Architecture without an architect and cities without planners are the reality of the majority of the human population, either by choice or by necessity. According to Dobraszczyk, the spatial order of some of the cities of the Global North reveals its face to be exclusive and expensive – not only in the material sense.

Jane Jacobs notes that cities function well because of neighbourly relations and human exchange.[18]

The central planning or self-management dilemma is not an easy one to solve, especially from the perspective of a country whose space is the result of abandoning planning altogether. It is enough to mention the discussion about the need for spatial planning, which was so heated and urgent in Poland in the first years of the political transition after 1989. This period was perceived as an era of "anarchic" activities that led to spatial chaos and widespread ugliness. To this day, we remember with nostalgia the modernist city from the times of the People's Republic of Poland: even though it grew out of an authoritarian political project, it was planned rationally and with care for the quality of space. In the 2011 edition of the Warsaw Under Construction festival

○/○ Planning practices related to the development of modern cities has gradually led to the blocking of both democratic mechanisms and citizens' processes of self-organization. Planning, improving the quality of life, efficiency and hygiene has resulted in increasing centralization of power and professionalization of decisions, thus limiting the individual autonomy of residents. Planning in modern cities constantly and persistently aims to achieve relocation of poverty, spatial segregation, the inevitable processes of gentrification and exclusion at various levels, and ultimately also to the commercial valorisation of urban areas, which follows these phenomena. And yet, not all dimensions of urban life can be controlled and planned.

18 Ibid., p. 14.

19 *Manifest nieuczestnictwa* [in:] *Warszawa w Budowie, edycja 5. Program & teksty*, Warszawa: Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej, 2011, pp. 101, 105.

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A library organised as part of Occupy Wall Street
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photo: David Shankbone / Wikipedia Commons CC BY 3.0

(held under the slogan "Back to the city"), the architecture in the times of the political transition was called "parachute architecture". According to the authors of this term, it did not respect the context: it was forced upon the place, it was aggressive and arbitrary (adhocism comes to mind – a term Jencks applied to selected postmodernist projects). On the occasion of this festival, a conference devoted to this type of built environment was held. Conference participants seemed to equate ostentatious examples of uncontrolled business activity with arbitrary development of abandoned blocks of flats in the former Soviet Union or other "anarchist" activities. In the eyes of the speakers, these were manifestations of the same phenomenon: ugly, flashy buildings, erected without a plan or plainly against the law; superstructures, stalls, glaring signs and advertisements, suggestively called by Piotr Starzyński the "scream of space", resulted in an urgent need to control that illegal construction, to squeeze it into the framework of superior plans. The publication accompanying the festival is actually a collection of manifestos, including the "manifesto of non-participation", and it bluntly expresses disagreement with chaotic, unplanned construction. Strong, stern demands were written in capital letters:

> However, we do not always want to and are not always able to participate. We also have the right to not participate. [...] Authorities should respond vigilantly to changes, study the potential of the cities - and especially watch all that is spontaneous, grassroots, self-generated. The discussion on the forms of participation cannot take place without a debate on the social order.[19]

Despite the rather democratic character of these appeals, the organizers and commentators were guided by their belief in the strength of the municipal authorities, in the professional approach, and in the need for spatial planning. The key words of the text – coordinated actions, coherence, consistency, professionalism, management, competence – all refer to the exclusive, technocratic model of city management, based on the competence of professionals. Participation with a (justified) right to non-participation (it is no coincidence that the booklet closes with an interview with Markus Miessen about the "nightmare of participation") can and even must be an important element of urban policy, but only within the framework set for it. It is always an element, but not a subject, not an agent. Anarchy is accused of generating chaos – of unambiguously connecting with the neoliberal individualistic disorder and cluttering the space. Although these accusations raise objections from people who observe the workings of activists – incidentally, they also raise my objections (since 1989, few organizations have spoken more clearly against the neoliberal system than the anarchist community) – they seem to effectively define the unspoken line of the conflict of attitudes discussed in this text, on both sides of the barricade, which are seemingly the same, i.e., anti-liberal. That barricade runs between autonomous self-management and technocratic top-down management. In a city subject to the dictates of planning, self-organization will be present only in designated places, and only if clear rules of participation are observed. It will often be reduced to a convenient simulacrum that legitimizes the liberal order.

However, since we all want to live in pretty, professionally managed cities (and perhaps Polish cities fit this description better today than they did in the 1990s or in the first decade of the twenty-first century) – also, since we are not experts in local planning or construction technologies, and we cannot discuss them; at the same time we do not have time to deal with them, and we are allowed to refrain from participating – why should we even think about the anarchic model of shaping the environment of human life?

According to Dobraszczyk, anarchic architecture is an important alternative for thinking about the future of cities that are now mired in a multi-level crisis. It offers hope for a more inclusive society and ecological construction that are adapted to the needs of a world struggling with scarcity of resources, excess consumption, and authoritarian management models.

○ / Anarchitecture enforces the reuse of materials, the economical expenditure of resources, responding to crisis situations, creating support networks, and gaining self-sufficiency. It resembles the societies of the Global North in terms of the ability to self-organize, to make independent decisions or negotiate them in critical situations, and to count on oneself when the convenient paths of political services and consumer services fail. There is tremendous potential in self-organization – a significant feature in the recent difficult times of pandemics, environmental crisis, and war. Anarchitecture also offers an emancipatory chance to the architect's occupation: it moves the architect from the stance of a social engineer to the role of a mediator and participant in social processes, thus restoring the somewhat strained social trust in this profession.

I do not know whether this kind of design and decision process could fully replace structures based on planning, or whether it makes any sense to replace one system with another. Organizing self-organization destroys its essence; self-management cannot be managed or governed. Nevertheless, there is a direction worth taking: not to supervise and not to punish; not to create cities based on separation, parcelling, ordering, clearing and relocation – cities where people have no chance or desire to meet. Anarchitecture does not require nurturing or appreciation or even funding; all it needs is a city that does not subject it to oppressive control and restriction. This can be done without anarchism, and it can be done without architecture. It flourishes at revolutionary meeting points between different people, in the light of mutual visibility, in different situations that we can neither foresee nor plan today. ●

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St. Michael's church in the refugee camp at Calais
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photo: Liam-stoopdice / Wikimedia Commons
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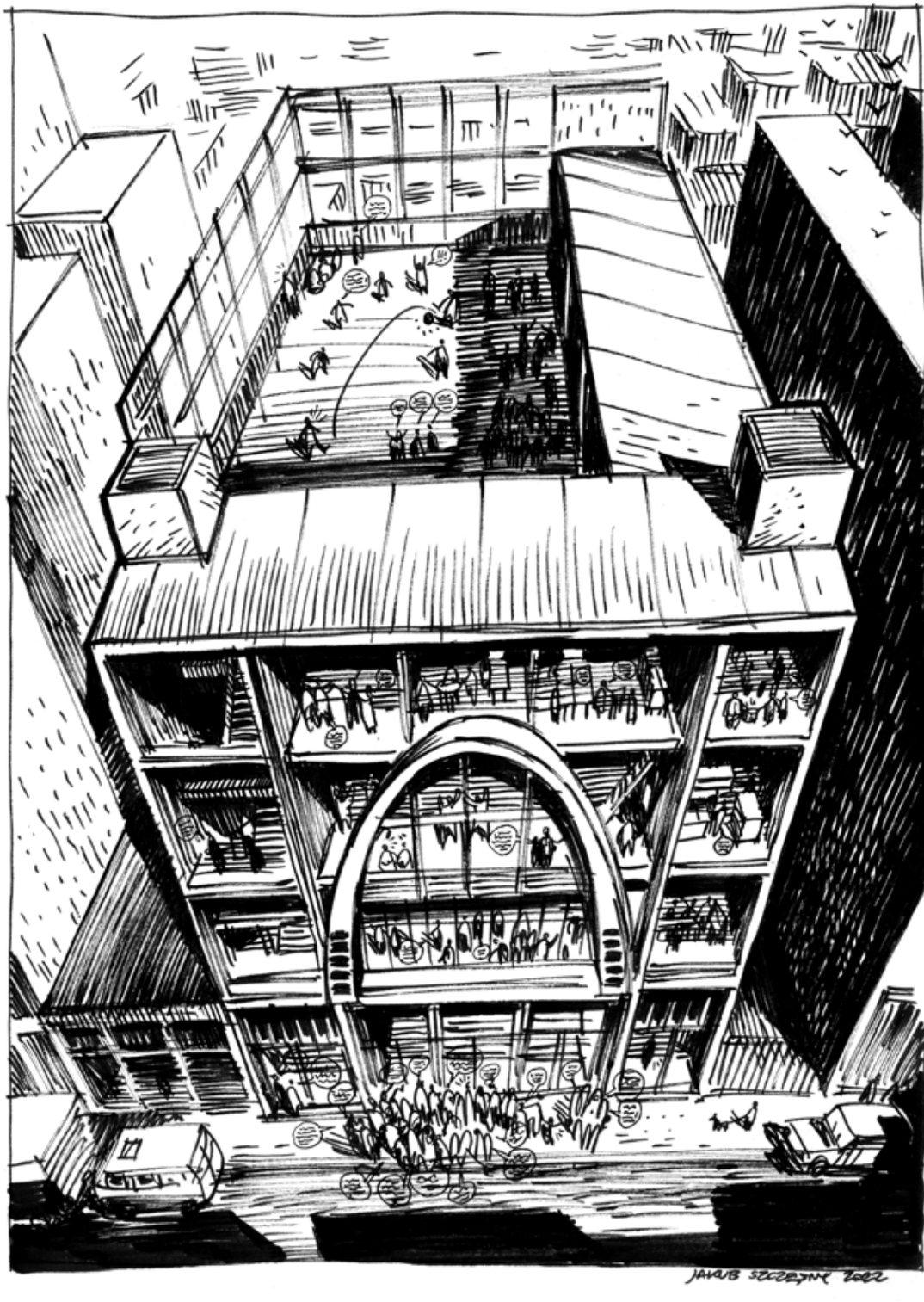
TEXT
AND DRAWINGS ○ JAKUB
SZCZĘSNY

Casa do Povo, or the urban utopia of Polish Jews in São Paulo



The more inquisitive Readers may ask whether I have ever even come close to a utopian project or lived in a building that was an attempt to bring utopia to life. I will answer straight away: I did live – and not like an "ordinary utopian citizen" – in a more or less strange apartment or house, but on the roof of a large building. Not unlike Karlsson On The Roof from Astrid Lindgren's book, except that my pseudo-house was on top of not a banal Stockholm tenement house but a multifunctional building in the heart of São Paulo. I spent my nights in a hastily adapted former kindergarten room and my days in the shadow of an installation I designed in the middle of a large terrace, which used to be that kindergarten's playground. A rooftop playground, naturally. In São Paulo, many buildings have rooftops with schools, kindergartens, recreation areas and other functions that we would ordinarily expect to see at street, ground floor, or garden level.

How did I get there? Well, quite simply, on a December evening in 2014 I had dinner in Warsaw with Benjamin Seroussi, an enthusiastic French-Tunisian-Polish Jew, much younger than me and the freshly appointed director of an intriguing institution in Bom Retiro, an emigrant district of São Paulo. Casa do Povo, or People's House, takes its name from public buildings erected in Portugal since the 1930s, intended for housewives, farmers, and rural workers.[1] They combined many functions: adults were taught to read and write, craft courses were conducted, afternoon entertainment was provided in the form of social games, and in the meeting rooms the people were made "politically aware" with appropriate talks and speeches by political commissars. Over time, People's Houses transformed into village and small-town community centres, and when they finally appeared in Brazil they were no longer associated with any political agenda. Up to a point. In 1953, Jews representing a wide range of leftist sympathies, mainly emigrants from Poland, Russia and the area of today's Baltic states, opened their own People's House in São Paulo. A veritable urban utopia, and a leftist one at that.

In the People's House, the dream heart of the community, a long-negotiated vision was implemented in which representatives of various groups and factions took part.[2] Interestingly, this factory-sized building was also constructed thanks to the generous sponsorship of local millionaires, and not only to donations from the progressive Jewish community. The group of leading benefactors was joined by Prince Roman Sanguszko, a legendary and influential developer who had a history of being one of the richest landowners in pre-war Poland. Fleeing from the Red Army, he left his estate in Volhynia and did not stop until he reached São Paulo.[3] He soon realized how to put himself on the map of influence and sympathy of the dynamically expanding metropolis. He supported the communist Casa do Povo; he was also the founder of the landowners' Club 44, a Polish retirement home and a church for Polish Catholics, and he co-founded several synagogues in the Bom Retiro district. No wonder many people still remember him fondly!

The idea of building the Brazilian Jewish Cultural Institute – as the building was originally called – which would serve as a multifunctional centre of social activity, emerged in 1946. It was supposed to be the antithesis of the initial concept of a traditional monument commemorating the victims of the Holocaust and, at the same time, the victory over the Third Reich. On the day the construction committee was established, hundreds of people stood under a large banner with the inscription: "Remember! Remember the six million murdered Jews!" As Benjamin explained to me during that dinner in Warsaw, the idea was the founders' response to an appeal by the Jewish section of the anti-fascist front in 1937: to create Jewish cultural outposts wherever possible in order to protect secular values against the then-growing fascism, but also against the Jewish version of provincial religiosity that in today's Poland we call "churchy" ("kościółkowa"). ○

○ / **In a nutshell, the Pauline founders wanted to create a living commemoration. Instead of a lifeless block, they dreamed of a place bursting with activity: a place for sowing thoughts, of birth, growth, life and natural dying, and over time, of the emergence and flowering of new forms. A bit like being in the jungle. In this way, colloquially speaking, the Jewish community from Central and Eastern Europe would show the middle finger to fascists and Nazis – and there were still plenty of them in the world, including in Brazil. The visit of the director of this institution to Warsaw was the next stage in its life cycle; in biological terminology we would call it dissemination and new growth.**

I liked the vision, so when Benjamin suggested that I take part in the revitalization of the building's forgotten roof, I agreed without hesitation, although it would be far-fetched to call me a Jew, let alone a communist. At the time, I had no idea how much relevance the message of Casa do Povo would re-gain in the context of the dark forces rising to the fore in Hungary, in my home country, and in the United States. They did not spare Brazil, either.

The members of the construction committee were guided by the principle "To remember is to act". In 1946, thanks to the generosity of the first donors, they bought a plot of land in the Bom Retiro district, back then a centre of the Eastern European diaspora, both Jewish and

1 The first of these was established in 1934 in Barbacena, not on the initiative of socialists or peasants, but on the order of the conservative dictator António Salazar. At the same time, in coastal towns, the regime built Fisherman's Houses (Casa do Pescador) with similar educational and cultural functions. People's Houses still exist today and, as far as I know, they are doing very well. If you want to see it for yourself, visit Casa do Povo in Messines, in the Algarve region, in the south of the country.

2 To realize how difficult it was to negotiate that vision, suffice to say that there were different factions involved in the planning of Casa do Povo, including Stalinists, Trotskyists, Marxists and "ordinary" socialists.

3 During a cruise from Lisbon to Brazil, Roman Władysław Sanguszko met a wealthy widow, Germaine Lucie Burchard; thanks to her money and his own talents, he became one of the largest real estate investors in the city. He built almost the entire modernist district of Higienopolis.

←
Illustration from the book *Azyle, nisze i enklawy, czyli katalog małych utopii*

those practicing other religions. Most of these people came from the intelligentsia; they had received good, if not excellent, education, and the need to adapt to Brazilian conditions required them to transform into entrepreneurs. Bom Retiro was then – and still is – a vibrant, multicultural melting pot. The district's inhabitants worked mainly in the textile sector, in the current area of fabric wholesalers, countless shops, small manufacturing plants, sewing workshops and pattern shops. Families who disembarked from transatlantic ships started their first businesses thanks to the Singer-brand sewing machines they had brought with them from their home countries. They slowly grew, stood on their own two feet, and took root in the new reality. It was easy for educated (white!) people to become members of the urban elite within a span of one generation. This is where subsequent generations of scientists, theatre people, writers, architects, and journalists come from.

The building was designed by architects Ernest Mange and Jorge Wilheim. A five-story structure was built with an underground theatre and a "sky" kindergarten, and a playground was set up on the roof. The entire facility has over 4,200 square meters of usable space. Young artists were invited to design interiors and murals in the theatre. The above-ground levels, over four meters high, were covered with prefabricated elements of reinforced concrete, which enabled a large twenty-meter span without the need to use additional columns. The rectangular shape of the building was conceived as a generously illuminated box, ready to be constantly filled with new content, with the interiors as flexible as possible. From the side of Rua Três Rios (the street of Three Rivers), the building looks like a large, glazed sewing room decorated with an elliptical arch above the entrance. The arch was an obvious sign at that time: it referred to the design of Le Corbusier's Palace of the Soviets. Under the arch, a series of glass doors led to a wide staircase that led to a large meeting room on the ground floor, which was raised just like a piano nobile in a palace. On either side of the stairs, there were entrances to the underground theatre, but the latter had little in common with the alternative stages that were proliferating in adapted basements, apartments, and former workshops. TAIB (Teatro de Arte Israelita Brasileiro), as this place was called, had an auditorium for five hundred seats and hosted many experimental groups that went down in the history of Brazilian culture, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. It was then – despite the repressions of the military dictatorship ruling at the time, including censorship and arrests of members of the TAIB theatre company – that the theatre gained a reputation far beyond being a club of aging Jewish townspeople with leftist roots. ○

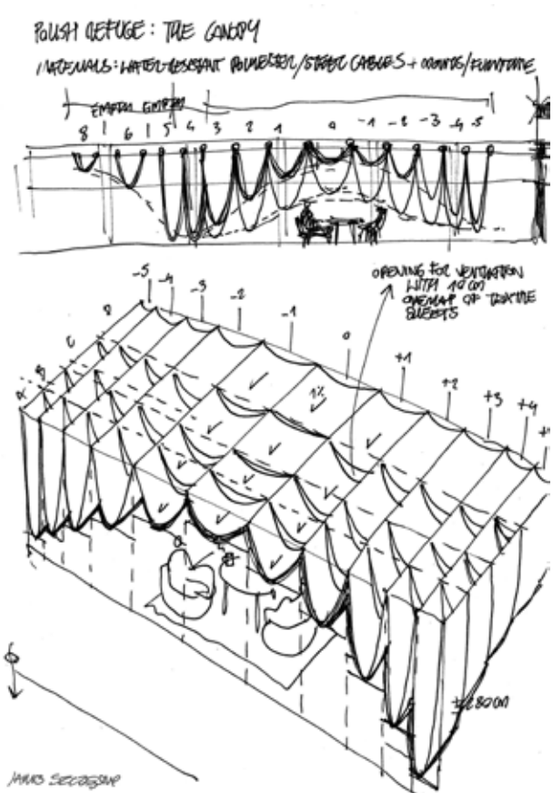
○ / Casa do Povo achieved something that seemed impossible: it avoided the double inbred status of a centre for Jewish communists. That is where its strength came from. Although it was an island of a kind – somewhat alienated, especially during the Cold War and the dictatorship – it was also a relatively safe haven for subsequent Brazilian avant-gardes. It attracted cultural experimenters, progressive educators, and marginalized or persecuted communities and minorities.

It is no different today, since the fading building was taken over by a group of thirty-year-olds in 2012. During the five weeks of my stay, there were meetings of indigenous activists representing tribes forcibly evicted from their lands by plantation owners. Congolese singers fighting against the dictatorship in their country gave concerts under the roof that I designed; on the ground floor, professional journalists and lecturers from the University of São Paulo conducted courses for comunicadores comunitarios, i.e., amateur journalists representing, in particular, national minorities, of which there are plenty in São Paulo.[4] Benjamin told me about the "new deal" at Casa do Povo:

> With a few other people we just came to a large room on the ground floor. The one where the Yiddish choir and chess club have been meeting for over sixty years. We told these retirees that we wished to take over Casa do Povo. To make it a living place again. You know, it was terribly empty and sad there. They told us to come back the next day because they had to think about it. When we returned, old men and old women were waiting for us. They got up, hugged us with tears in their eyes and said that they had been waiting for this moment and that they wanted us to pursue leftist issues in particular, because Jewish issues were doing well.

I saw this scene in my mind's eye. The abovementioned all-male chess club and female-dominated choir still function to this day. The host, Hugueta Sendacz, has been singing and conducting here since 1953.

The ambition of Benjamin and his colleagues is to restore the level of intensity of life and intellectual ferment that had accompanied this place until the 1980s. Back then, the building was bursting with activity. During daytime, the "Nossa Voz" daily paper was produced and printed here; there was a primary school and a kindergarten; vocational and language courses were conducted; the rooms at the back were rented as studios by designers and artists, and professional and amateur



4 As a curiosity, I would like to mention that the largest Japanese diaspora in the world lives in this currently most populous South American city. Today, the Bom Retiro district is dominated by Peruvians, Koreans, Congolese and... European hipsters. Jews and Polish Catholics became rich, and they moved to more expensive districts. We owe the local "hybridization", among other things, to the unique Japanese-Brazilian cuisine. Be warned: local maki sushi rolls have a diameter of about eight centimetres and are as long as a police baton. After all, in a big country, everything is big!

5 Supported by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute. In 2016, the Institute organized the Polish Culture Season in São Paulo – a series of events, exhibitions and acts of cooperation between Polish and Brazilian artists.

theatres held rehearsals and performed plays. There used to be a library and a bar, and discussions flourished in the spacious rooms during the meetings of all kinds of leftist groups and dissident organizations. There were countless readings, lectures, receptions, and large social events.

For thirty good years, Casa do Povo and the entire Jewish community have gone through many ups and downs. ○

○ / ○ / A place born of Holocaust trauma and the desire to actively resist the pro-fascist sympathies of right-wing politicians in South America almost ceased to exist when, after the death of Stalin, his actions against Jews began to come to light. The information coming from the USSR triggered a crisis of values among many followers of the Soviet model of communism. A decade of neoliberal rule, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the decline of the global left, i.e., the 1980s, dealt an almost-final blow to the centre. The slogan "Get rich!" affected many of the younger patrons from the second generation and the richest co-founders who, since the 1950s, had managed to become major industrialists, merchants, and real estate developers. They would visit the centre out of sentiment only. Competition appeared: another centre of Jewish activity was created that was closer to Zionism and the spirit of yuppie. Over the next almost three decades, the building gradually became depopulated and the remaining attendees, loyal to leftist ideals, inevitably aged. They did not have the energy to carry out repairs or renovations. Then, the third generation grew up. They contested the money and political conformism of their parents and looked favourably on the ideals of their grandfathers and grandmothers.

After years of slowly dying, the symbolic jungle began to be reborn, with my own modest participation. Together with Benjamin, we raised funds to renovate the terrace,[5] two adjacent rooms painted with patterns of suns and ladybugs, and the bathrooms – the most essential facilities for any human activity. In addition, we hung a temporary installation, designed by me, over the terrace area. Sheets of waterproof polyester cut using a digital cutter resemble a giant set of bed linen drying on washing lines; when combined into a three-dimensional composition, they provided shade and protected against minor rain. Every day I placed a sofa, two armchairs, a coffee table and a flowerpot underneath, and the space turned into an improvised living room of a Polish architect "in exile" – perfect for receiving guests. For five weeks, every evening, all sorts of events took place on the roof. Concerts, DJ sets, sponsor dinners, lectures, dances, improvised barter markets and everything that could attract people and at the same time bring life back to the roof. For my intimate, personal space, a bed and a desk in one of the renovated rooms had to suffice – shrouded in fumes from the sewage leaking during the rain. During the day, neighbours from the district came by, attracted by my appearances on local television. Descendants of Polish emigrants and former kindergarten students also came and reminisced with tears in their eyes about the part of their childhood spent here. There has been no elevator in the building since 1980, so getting to the top floor required a lot of perseverance, but the plan worked: life had returned to the roof of Casa do Povo.

At this point, the fairy tale could have had a triumphant ending, but the story continues, and it reminds us of its own unpredictability every now and then. Until recently, the president of the country was a man who openly glorified Nazism and threatened Brazilian democracy with his actions. What is more, he was also a danger to the rest of the world because he wanted to cut down a big chunk of the rainforest in order to distribute the Amazon area among the latifundists who supported him. Just like in a fairy tale. The forces of good – or perhaps simply the Brazilians – managed to remove the irresponsible president from power, but the question is for how long... ●

This text comes from Jakub Szczęsny's book *Azyle, nisze i enklawy, a catalogue of small-scale utopias* that will be published in autumn 2023 by Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej (Museum of Modern Art). We would like to thank the author and publisher for permission to include it in this issue.

Polish Refuge, a temporary installation on the roof of Casa do Povo
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photo: Edouard de Fraipont

←
Sketches for the *Polish Refuge* project
—
Drawings by Jakub Szczęsny

ZOFIA PIOTROWSKA

WOJCIECH MAZAN

Other pastures

Land commons – a relic or a model for managing communal assets?

Building of the former Dom Książki [House of Books], currently the seat of the Retirees Association and the University of the Third Age (upstairs), with a bicycle shop downstairs. Facility built on a plot of land purchased by the Forest and Land Community in Siewierz, built with their financial participation
—
photo: Janusz Nawrot, President of the Miłośnicy Spółki Leśno-Gruntowej w Siewierzu [Lovers of the Forest and Land Company in Siewierz] association w Siewierzu

←
Drawing by Mateusz Piotrowski

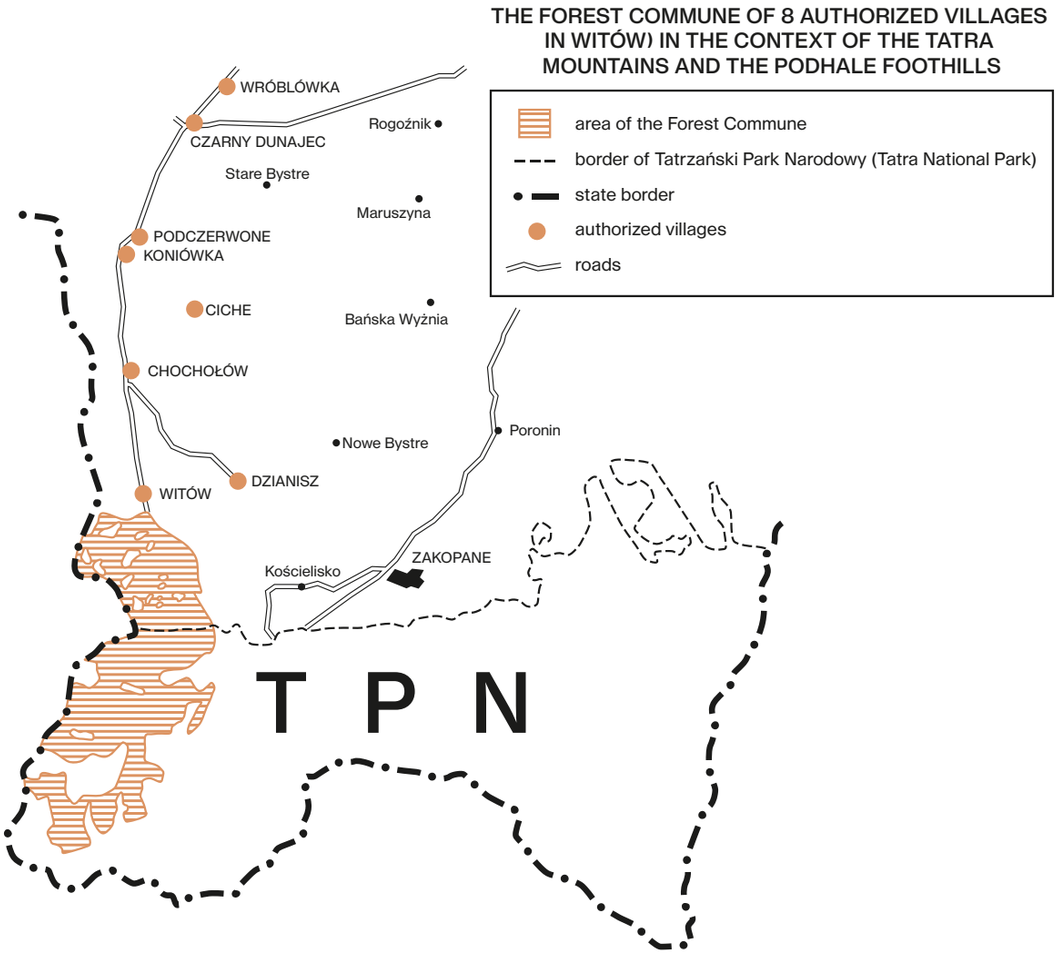
Rural sources of common assets

Tangible and intangible common goods or assets and the forms of their management constitute an important element in the debate on the organization of space and society. In our part of Europe, the spectre of the region's socialist past does not allow researchers to go beyond perceiving common goods as a relic of the past system that is ill-adapted to market realities, therefore analyses of them take place in relation to the processes of nationalization and collectivization. We often look for the early seeds of common goods in rural areas, but we mistakenly assume that the provenance of this phenomenon is limited to the post-war period. In today's Poland, the most expressive form of communal asset is land commons[1], which have been in operation continuously for over two hundred years and are not the product of obligatory sharing (such as the collectivization process and the resulting agricultural cooperatives); instead, they can be identified as models or blueprints whose origins illustrate the desire for self-organization of local communities that are closely related to a specific area. "Such areas are estimated to cover approximately 5% of the territory of the European Union (EU), but this figure goes up to 9% when non-agricultural areas such as forests, coastlines, etc. are also taken into account"[2]. Land commons are not a post-socialist relic; they exist in all regions of our continent: in Mediterranean countries, in mountainous areas (in Austria, Switzerland, Norway), and in countries where pastures have played an important role, such as Great Britain, Ireland, Iceland, but also Germany and Central and Eastern Europe.[3] ○

○ / ○ / **Commons in Europe can be defined as land to which many people have rights of use, although none of these people owns it. Often, these areas are owned by various types of public entities, local government bodies, or institutions, including parishes. Separately established common rights allow a group of people to use an area for their own purposes, such as grazing animals, collecting firewood, or access to water.**

The English term "commoner" means a user of such a community property. The existence of European commons is based on servitudes, that is, the rights of peasants to use the meadows, forests, lakes, and rivers belonging to a manor estate. On the one hand, the survival of the population depended on them as they provided the opportunity to graze cattle, cultivate crops, harvest the fruit of the forest, and fish; on the other hand, they were the cause of numerous conflicts, requiring the peasantry to constantly fight to maintain the rights granted to them, and to struggle and resist the mounting tendencies to build fences.[4] In other words,

1 As is often mentioned in the literature, researchers count the two hundred years of the history of land communities from the moment of peasants' enfranchisement in the second half of the nineteenth century. Such a generalization is justified because most land communities were established as a result of the abolition of serfdom.
2 R. Śpiewak, A. Kłoczko-Gajewska, J. Kłobukowska, *Znaczenie obszarów wspólnie użytkowanych (land commons) w Polsce w produkcji żywności – wstęp do dyskusji*, "Wieś i Rolnictwo" 2023, No. 3 (196), p. 110.
3 Models of common areas can also be found outside Europe (on the Old Continent, the most famous are the British *commons* and the Swiss *Allmende*): in Mexico (*ejido*, similar in functioning to Polish land communities), in India, and in Nepal. I. Lipińska, Z *prawnej problematyki wspólnot gruntowych*, "Studia Iuridica Agraria: Rocznik Stowarzyszenia Prawników Agrarystów" 2011, No. 9.
4 P. Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*, Oakland: PM Press, 2014.



Wspólnota Leśna Uprawnionych 8 Wsi w Witowie (The Forest Commune of 8 Authorized Villages in Witów) in the context of the Tatra Mountains and the Podhale foothills
—
drawing by Mateusz Piotrowski

the history of commons in rural areas is also a chronicle of models of opposition against modernization processes that "triggered survival and coping strategies among peasants, often of a collective nature and on an impressive scale".[5]

Over-exploitation versus inefficiency

The greatest doubts about common goods arise from their excessive exploitation. This problem was described in 1968 by Garrett Hardin, who illustrated it with the example of a shared pasture. He stated that if a community using common resources is not exposed to negative external factors (such as war or plague), tragedy cannot be avoided.[6] The said tragedy is caused by shepherds: in order to maximize their own profit, they graze more and more animals on common pastures. This leads to resources being depleted before they can be renewed.

The example of a pasture clearly illustrates the essence of common assets: "it is not possible to exclude them from consumption, but there is competition in the consumption".[7] Economists also call the tangible and intangible resources that are accumulated in common assets common-pool resources, or shared-pool resources. Therefore, the most essential question regarding the theory of resource management concerns how to regulate the use of these resources. We decided to find examples of other "pastures", namely those where, thanks to the self-organization of communities who have co-created land communities, it was possible to develop mechanisms of self-limitation in the use of the shared resources and thus avoid the Hardinian tragedy.

The leading researcher of the theory of managing the commons is Elinor Ostrom, an economist and winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2009. The research results she presented in 1990 in the book *Governing the Commons*[8] refute the myth of the tragedy of the commons. The rules of community organization she describes allow for effective and sustainable management of the assets in the common pool. Examples from many countries, including Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Japan, and the United States, concern rural areas and various resources: meadows, forests, reservoirs, and water systems (intended for fishing and irrigation of farmland). The motivation of the

5 Ł. Moll, *Przecz z Komuną! Polskie modernizacje i widma wiejskich dóbr wspólnych*, [in:] *Trouble in Paradise*, W. Mazan (ed.), Warszawa: Zachęta – Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, 2020, p. 68.

6 G. Hardin, *The Tragedy of the Commons*, "Science" 1968, No. 162 (3859), https://www.garretthardinsociety.org/articles/art_tragedy_of_the_commons.html (accessed: 22 April 2023).

7 A. Daniłowska, A. Zając, *Gospodarowanie wspólnym zasobem na przykładzie wybranych wspólnot gruntowych w Polsce*, "Roczniki Naukowe Ekonomii Rolnictwa i Rozwoju Obszarów Wiejskich" 2015, No. 2, p. 15.

8 E. Ostrom, *Dysponowanie wspólnymi zasobami* [original: *Governing the Commons*], translated by Z. Wiankowska-Ładyka, Warszawa: Oficyna Wolters Kluwer business, 2013. The Polish edition skips the subheading: *The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Actions*.

9 Another rural spectre of collective cooperation comes in the shape of agricultural production cooperatives, operating to this day and regulated by the Act of September 16, 1982, Cooperative Law, Journal of Laws of 2021, item 648. They were created as a result of the often-forced process of collectivization. D. Jarosz, *The Collectivization of Agriculture in Poland: Causes of Defeat*, [in:] *The Collectivization of Agriculture in Communist Eastern Europe: Comparison and Entanglements*, edited by C. Iordachi, A. Bauerkämper, Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2014.

10 Including 2,104 agricultural communities, 729 forest communities, 79 water communities, and 2214 mixed communities, for example forest and agricultural communities.

11 C. Rudzka-Lorentz, *Aktualizacja stanu faktycznego i prawnego nieruchomości przez organy gospodarujące mieniem stanowiącym zasób nieruchomości Skarbu Państwa, gminny zasób nieruchomości i mienie gminne*, Warszawa: Najwyższa Izba Kontroli, 2009, p. 55.

12 G. Jędrejek, *Zarząd wspólnotą gruntową*, "Zeszyty Prawnicze UKSW" 2008, vol. 8, issue 1; I. Lipińska, *Z prawnej...*, op. cit., G. Wolak, *Common Lands within the Meaning of the Common Lands Act of 29 June 1963 – Selected Civil Law Issues*, "Nieruchomości@" 2020, No. IV.

community gathered around such an asset is tangible and measurable. The spatial, historical and anthropological properties of rural areas allow for deeper integration of a community focused around the given resource, which is not only an area of residence but also a source of subsistence.

The formation of land commons

Land commons are one of the last legally sanctioned forms of collective land management in Poland.[9] According to data collected in the 2009 report by Najwyższa Izba Kontroli (Supreme Audit Office), 5,126 properties in Poland can be considered to fall into the category of land commons.[10] These manage over one hundred and seven thousand hectares of land (6 per cent of the country's total farmland area).[11]

Land commons are not popular; they operate according to a complicated model that stands out from all other types of real estate (it is interesting that in this context the term "common" or "community" refers to the property, not to the persons entitled to use that property). Perhaps this is why this issue is mainly dealt with by lawyers.[12] To put it very simply, land commons may be former landholdings (possessory estates) or resources used by a specific community, therefore they are linked to royal endowments or decrees of the occupying states. Therefore, we are dealing with a closed resource of land with a long history of shared use by the peasant community. Of course, in the turbulent history of our country, many of these areas did not meet the legal criteria required by subsequent laws and were ultimately privatized or nationalized.

Fourteenth century

The roots of the commons date back to royal grants or endowments. Probably the oldest of these is the Piwniczna Szyja land common, which manages the forests in the vicinity of the village of Kosarzyska. It was established in 1348 by the endowment of King Casimir the Great. The king wanted to secure the border areas, therefore he decided to give the land to the settlers for their common use.[13] It is possible that Kadłub Wolny has the second longest history as a land common in Poland. It was created as a result of peasants purchasing land from knights' estates, and "this kind of transaction required the emperor's approval. Lo and behold, Emperor Rudolf III issued such an approving document in 1603".[14] The identity of these commons is built on the durability of place and tradition. Members of Piwniczna Szyja proudly point out that their existence was noted by the chronicler Jan Długosz, whereas the inhabitants of Kadłub Wolny, thanks to the tradition of keeping the Tsar's document, saved their land commune not once but twice from being taken over by the authorities: firstly, by the Germans, and later by the Polish People's Republic. Both cases illustrate the lasting tradition of self-organization and fighting for one's privileges.

Most commons were established later, during the partitions (occupation by neighbouring states), at the time of the liquidation of feudal property. Apart from commons so created, others were established on land acquired by peasant companies – a type of peasant cooperative created at the beginning of the twentieth century on properties used by gromady (communities – former units of administrative division covering several villages) of petty nobility, or communities established as a result of the division of manor estates.

Nineteenth century

The enfranchisement processes carried out in the nineteenth century were associated with systematizing the legal status of land communes. In the areas under Prussian rule (under the Prussian portion of the "partition"), the authorities decided to eliminate common land as quickly as possible; in the Kingdom of Poland and in Galicja, the legislators' policy was to maintain and regulate land communes. A source of conflicts between manors and villages was the existence of these land communes, which prevented or hindered building inter-class communities; as such, it was in the interest of the occupying states to preserve these land communes, although this also deepened the bonds between the oppressed groups. ○

Municipal Cultural Centre in Siewierz, built on common land with the financial participation of the Community
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photo: Janusz Nawrot

○ / ○ / **Andrzej Stelmachowski describes the turbulent history of four land commons in the Western Tatras.[15] Wspólnota Leśna Uprawnionych 8 Wsi w Witowie (Forest Commune of 8 Authorized Villages in Witów), probably the most famous land community in Poland today, experienced problems with purchasing land from the Austrian invader. The priest who conducted the transaction inflated the purchase price and squeezed an additional payment from the peasants. Then he appropriated the forest and forced the peasants to perform servitude, thus their efforts ended in failure.**

The other three communities were better organized and they resolved the situation with the invader. Since there was no category of land commune in Austrian law, co-ownership was established on their shared lands. As a result of this decision, the authorities of the Polish People's Republic treated them as private owners and nationalized the land, despite lawsuits brought against this decision by Wspólnota Sołtysów Podczerwieńskich (Commune of Podczerwne Village Heads). Over time, the Forest Commune of 8 Authorized Villages in Witów managed to establish a land commune in their

13 A. Stelmachowski, Relikty dawnej własności wiejskiej, [in:] Rozprawy i studia. Księga pamiątkowa dedykowana profesorowi Andrzejowi Lichorowiczowi, edited by E. Kremer Z. Truszkiewicz, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2009, p. 242.
14 Ibid., pp. 242–243.
15 Ibid., p. 245.

shared area; today that land commune covers most of the Chochołowska Valley. The highlanders run a tourist business there, which is heavily criticized for overly intensive forest management.

The interwar period

In interwar Poland, an attempt was made to unify and standardize the status of land commons. The Act adopted on May 4, 1938 defined in detail the types of land considered a common resource and provided for the division of real estate.[16] Although exceptions were allowed (in precisely defined situations, commons were not divided among those entitled to them), the authorities assumed the ultimate liquidation of the collective form of land use. However, they ran out of time and new rules were not implemented before the outbreak of the war.

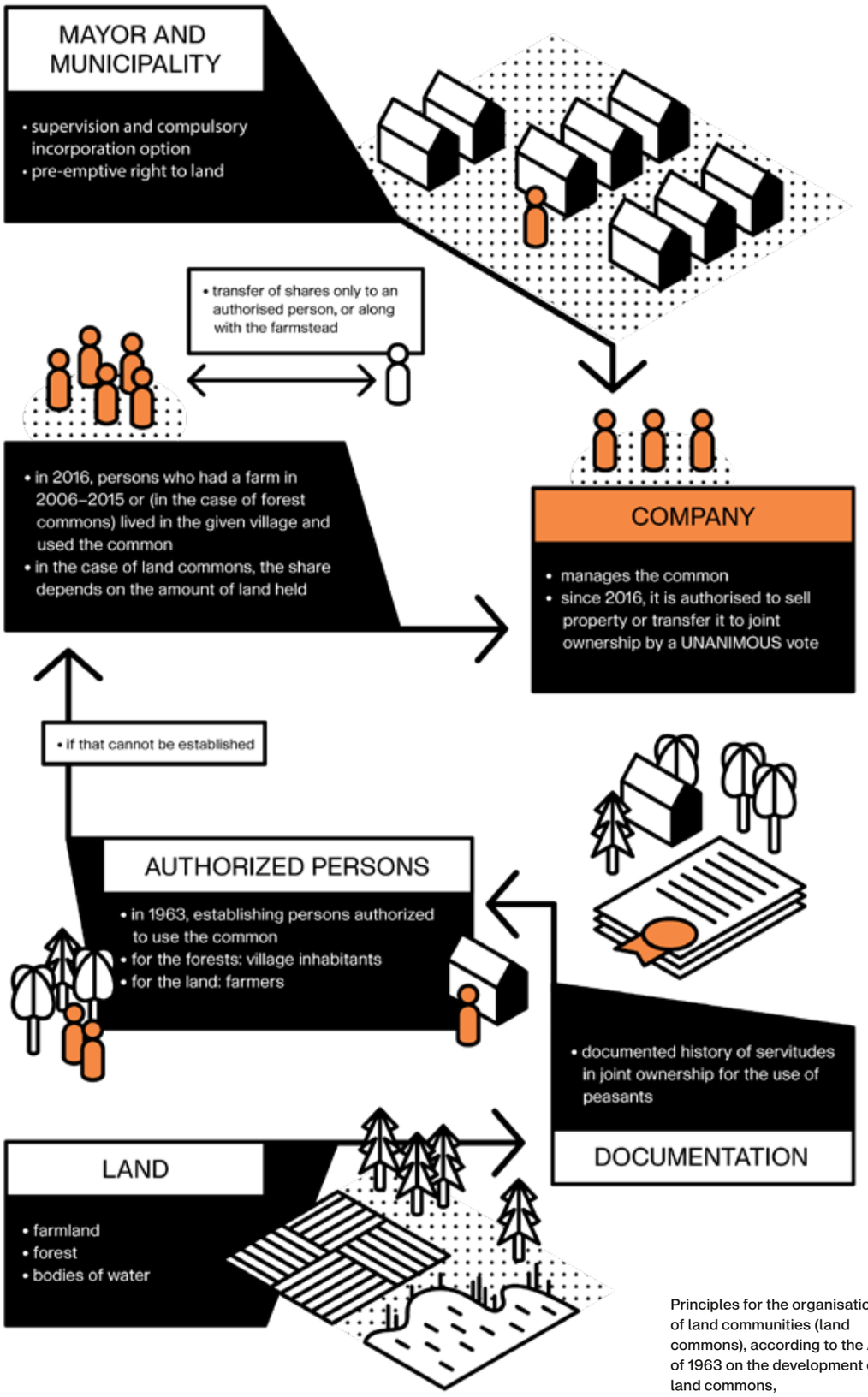
POST-WW2

The post-war authorities followed entirely different assumptions. As part of accustoming rural residents to team production and supporting collective forms of management of agricultural areas, the new law prevented privatization of the existing commons. The most important legal act from that period is the Act of June 29, 1963 on the development of land commons.[17] It is based upon the primacy of the indefinite duration of common rights and the impossibility of dividing resources between entitled persons; it even banned keeping land and mortgage registers for land commons. The right to use common land belonged to those who actually used it, but they had to establish an appropriate company to manage the resource. To this day, this Act has the greatest impact on the organization of land commons.

Persons entitled to participate in the land community may sell their shares, but only to other entitled persons or persons taking over their farm (as a result of sale or inheritance).

According to data from 2009, only 1,080 land communities had incorporated (i.e., established) their companies, of which 1,014 have been approved by local government bodies.[18] In other words, of the 5,126 land commons in Poland today, only about 20 per cent operate in accordance with the regulations.

The authors of the 2016 amendment wished to facilitate the establishment of companies that would manage land commons.[19] Previously, it was difficult to determine who was entitled to participate in land commons, so the amendment legalised the actual situation: people who had used a resource in the period preceding the adoption of the amendment would still be entitled to use it. Such a law facilitates the self-organization of local communities that actually operate within land commons. Additionally, the amendment abolished the ban on establishing land and mortgage registers for land



Principles for the organisation of land communities (land commons), according to the Act of 1963 on the development of land commons, and the Amendment of 2016
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diagram by Mateusz Piotrowski

real estate belonging to land commons. Importantly, although by no means obviously, the legislators did not assume the liquidation of the existing model; instead, they upheld the possibility of maintaining the current way of functioning of those land communities that do not wish to change their status.

Before we delve into examples of specific communities, we must emphatically state that most land commons do not seem to be functional: they do not meet the requirements set by law, nor do they conduct business or any other activity. Our opinion is confirmed by the above-mentioned report by the Supreme Audit Office from 2009. On the other hand, research clearly shows that those few operating communities feel responsible for their common area, whose rate of resource exploitation does not exceed the rate of renewal. Piotr Gołos's research [20] on forest land commons demonstrated that "in forest communities in the years 2003–2005, the share of forest regeneration was much higher than in private forests and was similar to the level observed in state forests".[21] Kamil Rudol also confirms that, in the activities of land communities, "the exploitation of the community's resources does not exceed the rate of their renewal".[22] He noted that the role of land communities has changed significantly since the 1960s. The main purpose of the 1963 Act was to improve land management. Today's communities are not limited to agricultural functions; they also conduct social and even cultural activities. Each community has different mechanisms for controlling or managing its common resources, but all these forms of self-limitation are created as a result of democratic processes, determined in the by-laws of individual companies managing land commons.

Operation of communities

Alina Daniłowska and Adam Zając analysed two examples of forest commons. The first one, the Land Common in Gąsawy Rządowe, was established in 1864 on the basis of the Tsar's decree. It ceased to operate for a period of time: from the introduction of martial law until 1998. Only the real and imminent threat of land takeover by the State Treasury motivated the farmers to establish a company, which was approved by the Municipal Board in 1999. 210 farmers are entitled to use the communal land. The community has over 70 hectares of land, 55 hectares of forests, 10 hectares of pastures, and 7 hectares of arable land. The second, the aforementioned Forest Community of 8 Authorised Villages in Witów, has existed since 1819. Members consider its history "an example of the attitude of a highlander, a Polish peasant in striving to protect his property and personal freedom",[23] which is evidence "of the privileged classes taking advantage of their position in subjugating and exploiting peasants as a class deprived of basic rights".[24] The community operates on the basis of by-laws approved by the district authorities in 1966, therefore it is a land community in which the self-organization of members and the continuity of their residence in one place allowed for the regulation of their legal status shortly after the introduction of the Act on the management of land communities. It is made up of forests covering an area of 3,083 hectares, of which 2,230 hectares are within the Tatra National Park (TPN), and the remaining part is in its buffer zone. The community consists of over two thousand inhabitants of eight villages in the Podhale region, each represented by one person on the board. ○

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Health Centre in Siewierz, built on a plot of land gifted by the Community
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photo: Janusz Nawrot

○ / ○ / **Despite their different origins, both communities have developed similar forms of using resources, including self-limitation tools developed within the structures of companies managing land commons. Forest commissions have been established, and forests are cultivated on the basis of forest management plans. The community in Gąsawy Rządowe spend the financial surplus generated by the company on renovation works and construction of a parking lot for the local parish, a football pitch, and a village community centre. They decided to exclude some land plots from their ownership and donate them for the needs of the Health Centre in Gąsawy Rządowe.**

16 Ustawa z dnia 4 maja 1938 r. o uporządkowaniu wspólnot gruntowych, Dz.U. Nr 33, poz. 290.
17 Ustawa z dnia 29 czerwca 1963 r. o zagospodarowaniu wspólnot gruntowych, Dz.U. 1963.28.169.
18 C. Rudzka-Lorentz, *Aktualizacja...*, op. cit., p. 59.
19 Ustawa z dnia 10 lipca 2015 r. o zmianie ustawy o zagospodarowaniu wspólnot gruntowych [Act of 10 July 2015 amending the Act on the management of land communities], Journal of Laws 2015, No. 0, item 1276.
20 P. Gołos, *Wspólnoty gruntowe – tradycyjna forma gospodarowania lasami*, "Sylwan" 2008, No. 152 (2).
21 Quoted in: R. Śpiewak, A. Kłoczko-Gajewska, J. Kłobukowska, *Znaczenie...*, op. cit., p. 118.
22 K. Rudol, *Status prawny wspólnoty gruntowej w Polsce*, dysertacja, Instytut Nauk Prawnych Polska Akademia Nauk, 2021, p. 174.
23 Wspólnota Leśna Uprawnionych Ośmiu 8 Wsi w Witowie, Historia, http://www.wspolnota-lesna8wsi.pl/informacje/historia (accessed: 22.04.2023).
24 A. Daniłowska, A. Zając, *Gospodarowanie...*, op. cit., p. 19, footnote 5.

Parish church of St. Matthew the Apostle in Siewierz; renovation and furnishings financed by the Community
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photo: Janusz Nawrot

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Building of the so-called old kindergarten in Siewierz (transferred to a new building in 2021), built on land belonging to the Community, with its financial contribution
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photo: Janusz Nawrot

The Witów community spend the acquired funds on current activities, administration, and maintenance of mountain trails. Budget surpluses go to public purposes of individual villages: construction of roads and rural bridges, purchase of equipment and construction of Volunteer Fire Department stations, as well as supporting the activities of schools. Both companies are united by a strong sense of community, thanks to which they operate efficiently.

Many other communities function similarly. The construction of the Cultural and Recreation Centre and the Volunteer Fire Department station was co-financed by the Forest and Land Community "Nadzieja" in Mierzęcice. Many land communities support their municipalities and individual villages with donations to schools, parishes, and social initiatives. A ski resort was built partly on the areas of the forest community in Jurgów, which had been stripped of trees by an exceptionally strong halny wind. It is managed by a company of local owners of plots in the area.

It is also worth taking a look at communities that do not meet the requirements of legislators; after all, informal activities can be excellent examples of cooperation, especially since compliance with complex regulations, in particular identifying all persons authorized to use the resource, requires a lot of time and titanic amounts of work in the discussed model. Adam Zając examined two such communities. The community of the village of Myślakowice, despite its legal obligation, has not established a company.[25] This does not mean that it has not established informal rules of operation. Village meetings are chaired by the village head (sołtys), and the land is contractually distributed among authorized persons. The plots are exchanged every year: this rotation is intended to offer equal access to more productive land. The Forest Community of the Village of Domaniewice has not developed any mechanisms for managing the shared resource, and the residents freely use the hundred hectares of forest growing in its area. They take wood for firewood and to produce pallet boxes. However, no one cares about the regeneration of the forest, so its condition is getting worse every year.

The problems of self-management

The history of the Forest and Land Community in Siewierz dates back to 1523. Initially, the community managed the lands under customary law. In 1964, in accordance with the requirements of the 1963 Act, the Siewierz Community established a company to manage the community's resources: 1.1 thousand hectares, mainly forests. The most important public facilities and workplaces were built in non-forest areas: a sanatorium, a railway line, a primary school, recreation and health centres, a community centre, and even a municipal office. The company bought Siewierz Castle from a private owner and donated it to the municipality.

As much as 90 per cent of the community's land is covered with forest, which, according to members, is not particularly profitable.

> "Forest management, as a rule, does not bring income in our circumstances. This is related to the nature of the substrate on which the forests grow (it is sandy soil). [...] For several decades, the forest stand has been rebuilt towards more valuable species synchronized with local conditions. In the long run, the costs of silviculture are balanced with the revenues from the sale of timber. The company employs a professional forester. [...] Forests constituting a land common in Siewierz, despite their private nature, are generally accessible. They are of natural, ecological and historical significance to the company's members as they were planted by their ancestors; to a lesser extent, they are of economic importance, too. In the opinion of the forest district authorities, our forests are maintained in an exemplary manner".[26]

The company derives its main profits from the lease of non-forest land and occasionally receives compensation for the expropriation of a portion of its land, such as for the construction of a bypass. Decisions regarding the budget are made in the form of an open vote or a secret ballot. About four hundred people are entitled to vote, and although decisions are almost never made

25 A. Zając, *Sposoby wykorzystania zasobów wspólnot gruntowych w Polsce*, "Roczniki Naukowe Stowarzyszenia Ekonomistów Rolnictwa i Agrobiznesu" 2015, vol. 17, issue 6.
26 Online interview with Janusz Nawrot, vice-president of the Miłośnicy Spółki Leśno-Gruntowej w Siewierzu [Lovers of the Forest and Land Company] association in Siewierz, conducted in May 2023.
27 I. Lipińska, *Rola i funkcjonowanie wspólnot gruntowych we współczesnych warunkach gospodarczych*, "Problemy Rolnictwa Światowego" 2010, vol. 10 (XXV), issue 4, p. 43.
28 K. Rudol, *Status prawny...*, op. cit., p. 177.

unanimously, the company has so far allocated most of its income for social purposes. The range of supported causes is wide: a volunteer fire brigade, two local parishes, a pigeon breeders' association and a hunting club, and schools and hospitals. The land community selects entities that are important to its members, which – we should remember – constitute only about 3 per cent of the municipality's inhabitants.

In 2021, after a change in the company's management, a conflict arose between the members. A dozen or so people had established an association that monitors the activities of the management board on a continuous basis. The disputes concern the president's remuneration, accusations of leasing plots at underestimated rates, employing persons based on nepotism, and connections with the municipal authorities. One dispute even ended in a court case: the entitled person called on the company to pay a small amount – four hundred zloty. This case shows how difficult and time-consuming democratic management processes are, especially in institutions with a complicated legal model.

A relic or a model of good practice

Even before the amendment to the Act, lawyer Izabela Lipińska, a researcher at the Poznań University of Life Sciences, wrote: "The existence of land commons is contrary to the assumptions of a free-market economy and the assumption of rational action by farmers and business entities".[27]

Such thinking remains at odds with the way the countryside functions today, where only 12 per cent of residents are professionally engaged in agriculture. Kamil Rudol noted that despite the continuity of their history, the functions of land communities, understood in 1963 as a socialized model of agricultural production, "has evolved along with ongoing legal, political, economic and social changes. [...] Communities perform or may currently perform significant pro-environmental, socio-economic, and cultural functions that are important for modern agriculture".[28]

In areas that escape market pressure – due not only to the complicated legal situation but also to the low quality of soil – organizations have emerged that operate for the common good. Sometimes, the low level of potential profits has created mechanisms opposite to the "tragedy of the commons". An individual person using a shared resource receives little benefit, but when all these profits are added together in a common budget, it is possible to create infrastructure that will benefit both the individual and the entire community. ○

○ / **The self-organization of land communities has often been forced by the fight for sovereignty and granted rights – a class war waged against the masters – but also against any subsequent authority (foreign invaders, political parties, even local governments), or under the pressure of the market economy. The strong identity thus built leads to communities implementing the ideas of local patriotism.**

The mismanagement (manifested by a lack of proper management or planning of the use of these lands) which is present in some areas should not be assessed only from the perspective of financial loss; sometimes it results from the exclusion of part of the land from the operation of speculation mechanisms. At the other extreme of the processes that shape space, we find equally unorganized and uncontrolled but rapidly progressing urbanization of rural areas. The possibility of going beyond the rules of land commodification and assessing it through the prism of profitability has survived as a relic. Between industrialized crops and animal farms, single-family buildings stretching to the horizon, and spaces devoted to logistics centres, we have few meadows and pastures left. At the expense of financial profits, land commons can function as a good practice model that offers a chance to preserve the natural rural landscape. ●

Castle bought from a private owner by the Community on behalf of Siewierz Municipality
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photo: Janusz Nawrot

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY ○ ZUZANNA KASPERCZYK-BRODECKA

The pleasure of city making

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Komuna Warszawa (Warsaw Commune), view from Nowogrodzka street

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Komuna Warszawa (Warsaw Commune), view from Nowogrodzka street, with Oxford Tower / Elektrim in the background

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next page: Komuna Warszawa (Warsaw Commune), interior

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Komuna Warszawa, courtyard

→
Komuna Warszawa (Warsaw Commune), bar/shed built as a result of collective improvisation. Part of Olek Gadomski's master's diploma, defended at the Department of Architecture, Warsaw University of Technology

> For some reason, people find it much more enjoyable to work outside of the system – to break new ground. Guerrilla gardening is more fun than applying for grants to implement a project and operating within specific bureaucratic structures. And this fact, it seems to me, should be used wisely.[1]

The clash between self-organization and top-down driving force is like an eternal game of cat and mouse. The tension generated and driven during this game enables activities to take place in the cracks of the system, and then the alternative smoothly transitions into the mainstream. It is creative but also limiting because grassroots movements that seek to redefine the city struggle with bureaucracy and face administrative and economic hurdles. They often have more enthusiasm, ideas and willingness than they have financial capabilities. They notice and address newly emerging needs, and this requires persistence and faith. Thanks to these qualities, they provide residents with a solid lesson in citizenship and materialize the idea of a truly good city.

OPENING UP NEW POSSIBILITIES

Grassroots activities are characterized by responsiveness, which in turn inclines them towards temporariness or ephemerality: there is a crisis, there is a need, there is an idea – let's act on it now! We'll see what happens next. Such a premise opens many doors, provides spaces that would otherwise be impossible or too expensive to rent, but it does so under certain conditions: you have to bear in mind the lack of stability, the uncertainty regarding the possible extension of the contract, the awareness of being in the given place only "for a while", and the fear of investing. ○

Researchers who study this kind of space management strategy pay particular attention to the unequal distribution of power and maintaining the state of precariousness.[3] The owners of land benefit from the cultural capital created by temporary users, but these users are not adequately rewarded for their contribution, including improving the public image and economic value of a given space.[4] Despite these adversities, three examples of self-organization in Warsaw, on the basis of which I will conduct my reflections, show that the durability of grassroots activities goes beyond the aspirations of individuals, and the prospects of long-term socio-spatial effects and collective benefits is enough to enter this unequal battle.

Plac Nowego Sąsiedztwa (New Neighbourhood Square), Komuna Warszawa (Warsaw Commune), Otwarty Jazdów (Open Jazdów): these are three different initiatives that share similar beliefs and locations. All of them are linked to Warsaw's downtown, and all are in densely built-up, sometimes hyper-gentrified spaces

○ / ○ / **Many initiatives for the temporary use of space do not want to identify themselves with that term as they do not want to be considered temporary; often, they have been operating in a given place for years. Supporters of neoliberal urban policy, however, consider even the long-term and socially established grassroots use of prime-location or expensive plots as temporary or transitory: something which happens before the "real function" appears. Having said that, criticism of the domination of economic considerations is mounting; then again, it tends to lead to temporary users being exploited by city authorities and developers as a "means to an end" rather than as a proper alternative solution.**[2]

1 Interview with Bogna Świątkowska, author of the idea, founder and president of the Bęc Zmiana foundation, curator of Plac Nowego Sąsiedztwa [the Square of New Neighbourhood]. Conducted on 14 April 2023 as part of a research project within the scholarship schemes for doctoral candidates in the capital city of Warsaw, 2022 edition.

2 C. Colomb, *Pushing the urban frontier: temporary uses of space, city marketing, and the creative city discourse in 2000s Berlin*, "Journal of Urban Affairs" 2012, vol. 34, No. 2, p. 141.

3 A. Madanipour, *Temporary use of space: Urban processes between flexibility, opportunity and precarity*, "Urban Studies" 2017, vol. 1, No. 17, p. 12.

4 Ibid.

Komuna Warszawa (Warsaw Commune), view from Emilii Plater street

where the business-oriented approach towards urban planning still triumphs. All three are working in opposition to this excessively scaled and overly posh district, which at times is functionally and socially exclusive. Their efforts to diversify and to green the city impact the sharing of the Śródmieście's (downtown) space. They spring from non-governmental organizations' many years of experience and studying the city. Thanks to these initiatives, the demands discussed at conferences and debates about the city for all actually come true.

A MOMENT OF TRANSITION

There is a deficit of places in the city where you could come with an idea, materialize it, and see if it works. The city's laboratory is open to trial and error because it develops itself through the proliferation of ideas and by trial and error, without a top-down plan. It considers testing and prototyping to be a logical step in community building and place-building, as these tools allow for the conscious implementation of assumptions developed by consensus, and, if necessary, for their modification. Here experimental ideas can be put into action by young artists and scientists who – in cooperation with Otwarty Jazdów and Komuna Warszawa, among others – implement their diploma theses, conduct their research, and carry out art projects. Using the created innovations while being open to changes makes the city's laboratories flexible and cable of adapting to changing conditions.

Another example of an urban prototype is Plac Nowego Sąsiedztwa (New Neighbourhood Square),[5] which features spatial and performative activities that build awareness around urban neighbourhoods. This project materialized in the form of the removal of the paving stones from a forty-square-meter section of Plac Defilad (Parade Square) and the planting of three hundred and fifty plants in this granite gap – this is how a model and visualization of Central Square was developed[6] The creators of New Neighbourhood Square undertook subversive action in a space considered sacred; they made a strong gesture in a conflict-prone place about which everyone has their own opinion. Easy access to the effects of their actions was important for architects and decision-makers because it provided insight into social reactions at an early stage of project implementation. It was used to communicate changes to future users of Plac Centralny (Central Square), and it is difficult to imagine a more explicit corporeal message. Warsaw residents could feel the coming change for themselves – the scent, the cold emanating from the earth and from the plants – and they were able to meet the new inhabitants of the square. The combination of prototype and provocation resulted in the creation of a "provotype"[7], a contribution to discussion and reflection.

> We did not put up any extraordinary structures or outdoor exhibitions there; instead, it was a rather simple, compact gesture that could be repeated and multiplied in various similar conditions, but at the same time it carried a lot of power and revealed a different reality. [...] We are used to the image of a concrete city centre, and putting in front of our eyes such a picture frame with a completely different space, a different reality, shows us that it is conceivable, that we can desire it, demand it, dream about it, that we need it, and that it is actually possible.[8]

Plac Nowego Sąsiedztwa refers directly to the target implementation – the concrete slabs were removed from the location of the future flowerbed, and the flowerbed will ultimately fill the gap during the implementation of the project. In this way, the status of the introduced greenery will change: from an acupunctural intervention of sorts – from an artistic action – it will turn into part of the ecosystem of Central Square. The prototyping afforded an opportunity to test how a specific activity actually functions (also in the technical aspect) and made it possible to draw conclusions and rectify assumptions. Unfortunately, this kind of working with the city is difficult to implement in Poland; people are nervous at the thought of spending public funds on the preparatory stage of an urban investment project, which is why it is difficult to manage it from above. The temporary development of Bankowy Square in Warsaw in 2019 was judged harshly by public opinion

5 Actions included in the Plac Defilad 2022 festival by Teatr Studio at the Parade Square, next to the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, https://placdefilad.org/pl/program-2022/ (accessed: 30 April 2023).

6 Winning project in the competition for Central Square, by the A-A Collective studio, https://architektura.muratorplus.pl/konkursy/znamy-wyniki-konkursu-na-plac-centralny-w-warszawie-aa-DUqR-Uuh6-8S3z.html (accessed: 30 April 2023).

7 Interview with Bogna Świątkowska, op. cit.

8 Interview with Aleksandra Litorowicz, president of the board of the Puszka foundation, curator of Plac Nowego Sąsiedztwa [New Neighbourhood Square]. Conducted on 19 April 2023 as part of a research project within the scholarship schemes for doctoral candidates in the capital city of Warsaw, 2022 edition.

and the media, and anecdotes about the project's failure are circulating to this day.

Grant competitions offer support for non-governmental organizations in the implementation of projects preparing future urban investment schemes, as mentioned by Bogna Świątkowska. Since they offer honest cooperation, I see them as an opportunity to use the potential and experience of people working with the city and the space, to propose some form of pre-runs or previews, and, as a result, to prepare residents for future change.

NEW STORY, NEW IMAGE

An important contribution of each of the discussed self-organizations is the introduction of new topics into the discussion. Social debate seems to be an invigorating idea in the reality of defective and limited procedures for involving citizens in public life and in decision-making. Traditional participation schemes, including public consultations, panels, and citizen budgets, are intended to involve residents in decision-making processes, but only on the terms set by the authorities. Determining clear and unambiguous ways and forms of implementing participatory involvement risks weakening spontaneous, democratic grassroots actions. Moreover, "civic participation procedures are embedded in the coherent system of neoliberal society, and they legitimize the democratic dimension of public sector decisions – which is in fact done in the interest of market solutions".[9] ○

○ / **The materialization of ideas and the practice of a specific way of thinking influence the conversation and take it to another level, where it is supported by hard evidence that can be seen, touched, and examined. The effects of prototypes can be a bargaining chip in negotiations, but acting in the name of important, necessary issues builds public opinion and propels this world forward.**

The question is often asked: how to develop a city? This topic concerns all residents; when discussed by non-governmental organizations and activists, it provides an opportunity for greater pluralism in the urban debate. What could a city centre be? What is it that makes a city good? How to design it? Finding solutions is particularly important for Warsaw's self-organizations because their presence in specific locations is tantamount to being in the centre of attention. They spark discussion because they question the laws that rule the world – and by the world I mean the neoliberal city. Komuna Warszawa and Otwarty Jazdów operate on a social and grassroots basis in places with huge economic potential. The sky-high price of land puts their users in a challenging situation.

The history of Open Jazdów dates back to 2011, when a heated discussion swept through the city concerning the liquidation of the Finnish cottages estate established in 1945. Some of the houses had already been demolished, and the Śródmieście (downtown) district authorities planned to earmark the area for public infrastructure and commercial development. In order to complete the plan, the inhabitants had to be evicted, and since the houses were municipal property, replacement flats were proposed. At some point, the negotiators resorted to methods that were coercive and not necessarily fair,[10] which led some residents to give up ("not everyone was ready to die for Jazdów"[11]), while it mobilized others to fight. The defence of Jazdów – of its cultural, architectural, urban and natural heritage – had begun. Others got involved: activists, the Finnish ambassador Jari Vilén, the media, and the people of Warsaw. The grassroots initiation of cultural activities in this area in 2013 (Open Jazdów Festival) turned the place – previously known to only a handful of people – into a citywide affair. A change in the scale of impact saved Jazdów, but the area is still not legally protected against diversion and sale, or against reconstruction dictated by a change in political agenda.

Komuna Warszawa (Warsaw Commune), Dzień dobrý den by Petra Dočekalova, view from Emilii Plater street

9 I. Sagan, Miasto. *Nowa kwestia i nowa polityka*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2017, p. 173.

10 Interview with Mateusz Potempski, co-founder of Open Pracownia Jazdów 3/6, which operates in the Finnish cottages estate. Conducted on April 27, 2023 for the purposes of this article. To motivate residents to leave their houses, the district authorities billed them – retrospectively and for huge amounts – for the use of their home gardens. The dues were to be cancelled if the residents of Jazdów agreed to move out to replacement accommodation in another location. Some people accepted this arrangement, but others rebelled against it, and the case went to court. Ultimately, the tenants won.

11 Ibid.

Komuna Warszawa was not founded around a specific location, but it was looking for a place of its own. It started in Otwock as Komuna Otwock (1989); it then had an episode of rural life in a pre-war school in Ponurzyca (1995–1999), after which several years of its activity (2007–2019) took place at Lubelska Street in Warsaw's Praga district.[12] These activists were subsequently forced to change their location again due to the threat of a structural failure, and so Komuna found itself on Emilii Plater street, in the building of a closed-down school, and at the same time in the centre of discussions about the future of this area. There was a plan to build two skyscrapers there, but at the request of the Miasto jest Nasze (The City is Ours) association,[13] the voivode repealed the local development plan for Śródmieście Południowe.[14] Currently, it will be even more difficult to build skyscrapers because the former educational buildings are now listed monuments: they have been entered into the register of the Capital-city Monument Conservation Authority. Alina Gałązka explained to me the confusion surrounding investment plans on this plot:

> This plot of land is worth two hundred million [zloty]. This constitutes a limitation, and some in the local government administration are still thinking about selling it and snatching that two hundred million. Still others wonder if they might not sell the plot but build a municipal facility here instead. Others believe that they could put some institution – not necessarily a cultural one – in this location or build apartment blocks because there is a shortage of apartments. And so on, and so forth. There are many different kinds of ideas. And so we want to convince the city that there is this other school that they can do whatever they wish with and still leave room here for such a residential centre. Our chances are not great, but they are not inexistent.[15]

Considerations on how to design a city are inextricably linked to greenery in that city. Aleksandra Litorowicz considers "greenery over concrete" to be an important goal of the project, even the paradigm for urban activities.[16] Residents' awareness is growing, year by year: "we have all become anti-concrete detectives who ridicule the new school of revitalization of town squares throughout Poland: all concrete, with a multimedia fountain, and cutting down trees".[17]

The trajectory of public acceptance and promotion of concrete stripping seems interesting. In 2020, the removal of paving from the sidewalk at Stalowa Street in Warsaw[18] received widespread attention and was considered an act of civil disobedience by gardening guerrillas; three years have passed since then and Zarząd Zieleni Miejskiej (City Greenery Authority) now publishes statistics on the number of square meters of concrete slabs that have been removed as part of the implementation of participatory budget projects.[19] Plac Nowego Sąsiedztwa addressed the issues of greenery in the most explicit, artistic and performative way:

Plac Nowego Sąsiedztwa (New Neighbourhood Square), close-up of a fragment of Plac Defilad with concrete stripped off

> And in our case, literally, it was greenery growing out of this gap in the concrete, in the granite slabs, as a simply essential and necessary way – not just a way, I don't know, a good way, a subjectively good way, an interesting way, or a needed way, but a NECESSARY way of designing the city. We must remove concrete from our public spaces.[20]

The launch of the Plac Pięciu Rogów (Five Corners Square) raised the temperature of the debate on city design and greenery in the city. It coincided with the inauguration of Plac Nowego Sąsiedztwa (New Neighbourhood Square). Residents of Warsaw did not take a liking to the place – it was loathed by the public. A sharp dichotomy was created between two projects: the gesture of greening the concrete square versus the insufficient amount – in many people's opinion – of greenery in the newly implemented project. The goal of the creators of Plac Nowego Sąsiedztwa was to prove

12 Komuna//Warszawa, https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/komunawarszawa (accessed: 30 April 2023).

13 *Miasto Jest Nasze zawiadomiło prokuraturę ws. planu zagospodarowania Śródmieścia Płd*, Portal Samorządowy, 23 November 2017, https://www.portalsamorzadowy.pl/inwestycje/miasto-jest-nasze-zawiadomilo-prokurature-ws-planu-zagospodarowania-srodmiescia-pld,100676.html (accessed: 30 April 2023).

14 A. Gruszczyński, *Mógł być wieżowiec, a jest teatr. Na czym polega tajemnica sukcesu miejsca w centrum Warszawy*, Wyborcza.pl Warszawa, 11 December 2022, https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,29204329,jest-teatr-a-moglby-byc-wiezowiec.html (accessed: 30 April 2023).

15 Interview with Alina Gałązka, member of the board of the Teatr Komuna Warszawa association. Conducted on 12 April 2023 as part of a research project within the scholarship schemes for doctoral candidates in the capital city of Warsaw, 2022 edition.

that stripping the concrete slabs "is a normal urban practice, and that in our times we should rethink this for the sake of water retention and for our mental and physical health. That we simply need to take this concrete off wherever we can, in every way possible".[21]

The conversation about shaping cities also touches on the topic of their inhabitants, on neighbourliness in the city, and on the need to expand the scope of our vision to include refugees. Their increased numbers, caused by the war in Ukraine, and therefore their more visible presence has mobilized all of the discussed initiatives to engage in aid activities (including the implementation of Ukrainian artistic projects at Komuna Warszawa, accommodating over a hundred people in Jazdów at the time of the greatest housing crisis, walks and workshops with the Ukrainian community within Plac Nowego Sąsiedztwa). And yet, urban neighbourliness can be considered on many levels:

> And so our proposal, on the one hand, was created with these refugee people in mind – people who simply used this space every day; on the other hand, this new neighbourliness concerned our new understanding of neighbourhoods in general, in a city which takes into account the multi-species perspective and the fact that we are neighbours with all living organisms.[22]

Talking about the city from the multi-species perspective results in expanding our thinking about urban greenery – taking it into account in the design of public space. It also prompts reflection on who we are and who lives around us, and how to build relationships with other city users. The construction of New Neighbourhood Square made it possible to observe the impact of the newly created flower bed and hydro-botanical pots on the appearance of new human and non-human neighbours, and their presence was the subject of debates and workshops organized as part of the project.

Open Jazdów is a true laboratory of neighbourliness, a community of residents and many non-governmental organizations. The "people from different stories"[23] there know each other; they talk to each other, but they also argue. ○

The discussed grassroots initiatives added new issues to the debate that they keep on implementing: the issues of citizenship and residents' possible reactions to what is happening in the city. From the very beginning, Komuna Warszawa in particular set itself the goal of "strengthening such a critical attitude and social self-organization, self-development, i.e., strengthening faith. [...] People think that they need a great deal around them to do something, and we try to show them that, no, it doesn't take all that much".[24] Social mobilization for action and inspiration for activism will suffice. Moreover, Komuna Warszawa and Otwarty Jazdów use new forms of management. Collective management/co-management provides previously unexplored opportunities for participation and talking about the common good and property ownership in general.

ALL SORTS OF THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

Each of the described initiatives needed to cooperate with the authorities in order to exist: all three operate on plots belonging to the capital city of Warsaw, and all of them have used or still use some form of public financing. This close relationship basically amounts to dependence on the favour of specific city officials and political parties. In order to maintain good rapport with the city authorities, non-governmental organizations and social activists must be aware of the need to comply with the law so as not to give anyone an excuse to terminate the contract. Interestingly, this relationship is problematic for both parties. Officials are worried about potential decision-making and investment blocks and administrative innovations proposed by self-organization schemes because that would mean a loss or limitation of control and going beyond the structured functioning system. Agreeing to something or establishing principles of operation with one organization may awaken the desire in other initiatives to replicate the model, and then the government would have to go beyond its comfort zone and change the law. Officials defend themselves against setting in motion such a complex and yet not-so-well-oiled machine.

Lauren Andres from the Bartlett School of Planning in London describes the tension between grassroots initiatives and city authorities as a contrast between

Plac Nowego Sąsiedztwa (New Neighbourhood Square), view from Marszałkowska street, with the Palace of Culture and Science in the background

Plac Nowego Sąsiedztwa (New Neighbourhood Square), view from Aleje Jerozolimskie

○ / ○ / **Non-human neighbours also inhabit the estate: over the years, a space has been created which is exceptionally bio-diverse for a city centre. More bird species live here than in any of the Warsaw's parks. They were tempted by this part of the city because it was "edible" – residents used to grow edible plants, and community gardens continue this tradition.**

16 Interview with Aleksandra Litorowicz, op. cit.
17 Ibid.
18 K. Kędra, *Rozebrali chodnik i zasadzili zieleń. Drogowcy: pewnie chcieli dobrze, ale sprawili nam kłopot*, TVN Warszawa, 23 September 2020, https://tvn24.pl/tvnwarszawa/najnowsze/warszawa-rozebrali-chodnik-i-zasadzili-zielen-na-stalowej-4699383 (accessed: 30 April 2023).
19 *Mniej betonu i więcej zieleni w Warszawie*, Zarząd Zieleni m.st. Warszawy, 3 March 2023, https://zzw.waw.pl/2023/03/03/rozplytowania-w-wielu-miejscach-warszawy/ (accessed: 30 April 2023).
20 Interview with Aleksandra Litorowicz, op. cit.
21 Interview with Bogna Świątkowska, op. cit.
22 Ibid.
23 Interview with Mateusz Potempski, op. cit.
24 Interview with Alina Gałązka, op. cit.

Otwarty Jazdów (Open Jazdów), view of the garden outside the Open Studio at Jazdów 3/6

weak planning versus master planning, and between place shaping versus place making.[25] The phenomenon of weak planning includes temporary use, which is becoming more prevalent in times of crisis: the number of vacancies is increasing, tenants' economic opportunities are limited, and there is no public money to meet socio-cultural needs, so they have to be met from the bottom up. Temporality blurs the boundaries between formal and informal activities and assumes a defensive, flexible, innovative and bottom-up approach that is independent of the market situation. Top-down planning based on durability, stability, linearity and control[26] is inherently aggressive and lacks the ability to react quickly. When the investment activities of the city and real estate developers are suspended, the power and the ability to shape the space fall into the hands of temporary users.[27] ○

The functioning of self-organization in the political and administrative system involves constant polemics and endless negotiations. Komuna Warszawa obtained consent to rent the building and the school yard after the city mayor intervened: first for a short term, then for three years, and for five years (until 2027). The members of the organization are happy with this decision and consider it a statement of trust, but they would like to stay there longer:

> If we are to take out loans, or if we are to really get EU money for further renovations here, we must have a ten-year lease. Nobody will simply give us anything without such long-term contracts. And this, I don't know if it is possible, but maybe it is. [...] All sorts of things are possible.[28]

Alina Gałązka touched on the typical problem of short leases and temporariness in general: it is impossible to plan, to invest; there is no stability. Power relations in such arrangements are unequal; the framework of activities is always determined by their promoter. Thinking about spatial interventions in terms of end users seems to be a form of rhetoric of domination that is supposed to divide functions into "better" and "worse" ones, which implicitly means more lucrative ones and less lucrative ones. If we look at space management more broadly, it turns out that there are no end users. There are only temporary users, because we all die someday.

The relations between Open Jazdów and the local government are interesting; sometimes their temperature rises. In 2013, the Municipal Council of the Capital City of Warsaw adopted a resolution according to which public consultations may be held at the request of residents. Later that year, the Jazdów community took advantage of the new law: they collected over two thousand signatures, and consultations were held in 2014.[29] "The consultation participants indicated that Jazdów should be allocated for educational, cultural and social activities by non-governmental organizations, informal groups, universities, cultural institutions and local government representatives".[30] Open Jazdów was a huge success: residents accepted a place created from grassroots and through intervention, and in the public consciousness it even became part of the city's identity. In 2015, the Warsaw

○ / ○ **If temporary place-making arouses sufficient interest among residents and authorities in the area, if it provides credible ideas for the development of that place, it will probably be absorbed into top-down planning. Tensions and conflicts arise when power shifts towards formal decision-makers from users who are shaping a place.**

25 L. Andres, *Differential spaces, power hierarchy and collaborative planning: a critique of the role of temporary uses in shaping and making places*, "Urban Studies" 2013, vol. 50, No. 4, pp. 762–763.

26 Urban Catalyst, *Strategies for temporary uses: potential for development of urban residual areas in European metropolises*, Berlin: Studio Urban Catalyst, 2003.

27 L. Andres, *Differential spaces...*, op. cit., pp. 762–763.

28 Interview with Alina Gałązka, op. cit.

29 Otwarty Jazdów, Historia, https://jazdow.pl/historia/ (accessed: 30.04.2023).

30 A. Latko et al., *Konsultacje społeczne w sprawie przyszłości i form funkcjonowania terenu Osiedla Jazdów. Raport z warsztatów i prezentacja koncepcji wypracowanej przez uczestników*, Warszawa 2014, http://konsultacje.um.warszawa.pl/sites/konsultacje.um.warszawa.pl/files/raport_konsultacje_osiedle_jazdow.pdf (accessed: 30 April 2023).

authorities recognized the results of public consultations as binding, but since then, despite repeated requests and mobilization from Otwarty Jazdów, no agreement has been signed that would guarantee the survival of the Jazdów Housing Estate and would include the Open Jazdów Partnership association of associations as a social entity and co-management partner.

The situation escalated in 2022, after the city created the project "Guidelines for the design and cost-estimate documentation for construction projects related to investments in the Housing Estate". In practice, this meant a top-down planned renovation of the Finnish houses. The meeting in October 2022 of the authorities of the Capital City of Warsaw and of the Śródmieście District with representatives of residents and non-governmental organizations operating in the Jazdów Housing Estate inflamed the media: conflicting reports appeared on the information channels of both sides; the city announced success,[31] while activists raised alarm:

> We are deeply concerned about the entire process as well as the communication style, about reactions or lack of reactions to our questions and comments regarding Jazdów and its future. We expect a partnership model of collaboration regarding the future of the Jazdów Housing Estate, and we demand respect for the social processes going on in the place, to which we – as residents of Warsaw and as NGOs – have been devoting a lot of time and energy for many years.[32]

Public pressure led to a change of plans and the creation of a working group that involves the Partnership and is dedicated to developing the project. The city will renovate three vacant houses, but at the same time it has announced a tender for the renovation of the infrastructure. According to representatives of Otwarty Jazdów, this is a hasty decision due to, among other things, the lack of a local development plan that would describe the guidelines and the framework for permitted changes. Moreover, the planned renovation does not take into account the potential development of the estate, which may in the future make it difficult, for example, to rebuild the demolished houses or to erect installations in their place that would commemorate their existence, while complementing the urban layout, which has been listed in the register of monuments. The sequence of planned interventions and administrative actions seems wrong. According to Mateusz Potempski, it was forced by politics related to the upcoming elections and the need to announce a quick success.[33] The agreement has been talked about for eight years, but for reasons unknown to the public, and fully dependent on the city and district authorities, it has still not been signed.

The value of the described activities of each initiative is largely due to the persistence of the activists and their belief in the need for – indeed, necessity of – cooperation. Being offended and refusing to speak to the city and its officials is not constructive in the long run. Seeking consensus and building trust and relationships translates into collective supra-individual benefits.

After all, "in [...] the world that we want to live in, there is nothing shameful about a city being successful".[34]

THE CHANGE THAT PRESSES ON

Capturing the essence of success and understanding the sustainability of fundamentally non-profit social initiatives is not an easy task. The results of their activities – notoriously difficult to measure, and often ephemeral – resist operationalization. However, based on the conversations and interviews I conducted, three areas of effects can be distinguished that are helpful in understanding the value of the discussed self-organizations and their contribution to building a better city.

Firstly, spatial change can be successful. Each of my interlocutors mentioned this. It's about keeping a space in good condition, renovating and restoration, but also improving its quality. The positive impact that grassroots activities make on space that is degraded (Komuna Warszawa), threatened with demolition (Komuna Warszawa, Otwarty Jazdów), or suboptimal in its development and/or functioning (Plac Defilad) is a form of building durability and an opportunity to change the identity of the place, and it has a material influence on its investment future.

Secondly, the measure of success is sensing the moment of change, recognising the potential, and pointing it out. Each of the described initiatives prototypes administrative innovations implemented in the form of real modifications in urban policy and new models of functioning. Komuna Warszawa operates in the mode of a social cultural institution that is pioneering in the context of the whole country;[35] also, it is working on a formula for a residence centre that does not yet exist. Open Jazdów prototypes new participation tools: as part of the research project "Community Management Model for Jazdów Settlement",[36] it created a "Draft resolution on the development strategy for the Jazdów Settlement in Warsaw" that is ready for signing.[37] Plac Nowego Sąsiedztwa was realized only thanks to a rare collaboration between many actors – institutional, non-governmental, and business – in order to conduct a gardening guerrilla scheme in one of the most famous Polish squares.

Thirdly, success is creating a continuum – communicating to others what you have done. This may be literally handing over a building or operating organization, or it might be implementing the above-mentioned modifications in urban policy to make it easier for subsequent similar initiatives, but success is also an inspiration to act. "A good practice example" is the best form of empowerment and motivation. It encourages us "to imagine a better city".[38] ●

Otwarty Jazdów (Open Jazdów), interior of the Open Studio

31 Facebook post by Dzielnica Śródmieście m. st. Warszawy, 28 October 2022, https://www.facebook.com/dz.srodmiescie/posts/pfbid02DUYtYYdCZ2LpURECanrduhDQzUvgCBq6WjVJipG1mR2J5RYzyPjZKRdafdhCAaLyl (accessed: 30.04.2023).

32 Facebook post by Otwarty Jazdów, 3 November 2022, https://www.facebook.com/jazdow/posts/pfbid0hdtB1dxAJ44rJEJnmqpyQairJg8fgfkPVBr2f7dKpNRVkgjZ2wTyqFuTo95aKiQol (accessed: 30 April 2023).

33 Interview with Mateusz Potempski, op. cit.

34 Ibid.

35 Komuna Warszawa, Kim jesteśmy, komuna.warszawa.pl, https://komuna.warszawa.pl/o-kw/ (accessed: 30 April 2023).

36 Otwarty Jazdów, Historia, https://jazdow.pl/historia/ (accessed: 30.04.2023).

37 *Otwarty Jazdów. Współzarządzanie przestrzenią miejską*, Warszawa, Otwarty Jazdów: 2017.

38 Interview with Aleksandra Litorowicz, op. cit.

VASYLYNA DUMAN

Social activist, journalist, volunteer. Participant of Euromaidan in 2014. She graduated from Ivan Franko University in Lviv (bachelor's degree in cultural studies) and the Ukrainian Catholic University (master's degree in journalism).

ZOFIA JAWOROWSKA

Activist, founder of the BRDA Foundation and Grupa Zasoby (Resources Group), an initiative that finds shelter for refugees from Ukraine. She has worked in the film industry and the non-profit sector and is currently involved in projects focused on housing and material reuse. Curator of the gold medal-winning "Poetics of Necessity" exhibition in the Polish Pavilion at London Design Biennale 2023.

MICHAL SIKORSKI

Architect and urban planner. Before he founded the TŁO design office in 2021, he collaborated with the Belgian architect Xaveer de Geyter on the masterplan for the Paris-Saclay campus city, among other projects. He has taught architecture and urban design at ETH in Zurich and currently teaches at the Warsaw University of Technology. Curator and author of the set design for the gold medal-winning "Poetics of Necessity" exhibition in the Polish Pavilion at London Design Biennale 2023.

PETRO VLADIMIROV

Architect and curator with an educational background in art. He gained professional experience with the Henning Larsen architectural office in Denmark and worked as a product designer in the real estate development industry. Together with the BRDA Foundation, he co-created the OKNA project. Initiator and participant of many interdisciplinary activities in Europe, his latest project is the Office for the Reconstruction of Ukraine at the Museum of Warsaw. Curator of the gold medal-winning "Poetics of Necessity" exhibition in the Polish Pavilion at London Design Biennale 2023.

ALEKSANDRA KĘDZIOREK

Historian of art and architecture, curator and editor. She has prepared several exhibitions, including "The Clothed House. Tuning into seasonal imagination", presented as part of London Design Biennale (2021), and "Oskar Hansen. Open Form". Currently associated with the Museum of Warsaw.

ANASTASIYA PONOMARYOVA

Ukrainian architect and urban activist working at the border of art, architecture, urban design, and community development. Ponomaryova has been deeply involved in several Ukrainian NGOs linked to urban development, including Urban Curators. She is currently working with the NGO Urban Curators on the conversion of an unused dormitory building into IDP housing in initiative Co-Haty.

KACPER KĘPIŃSKI

Architect and urban activist, wirter and curator. External projects and exhibitions manager at the Polish National Institute of Architecture and Urban Planning.

SLAVA BALBEK

Ukrainian architect, founder and CEO of balbek bureau, an award-winning studio based in Kyiv, known for its commercial and cultural projects (Kyiv Food Market; 906 World Cultural Center in San Francisco; Home. Memories in Antarctica). Initiator of RE:Ukraine System – a series of social initiatives taking up wartime challenges. Military volunteer serving as a drone operator and driver.

KINGA ZEMŁA

Architect. She obtained her master's degree with a thesis devoted to affordable housing at the Faculty of Architecture of the Royal University of Technology in Stockholm (2020). She publishes in "Builder", "Architektura i Biznes", "Zawód: Architekt", and "Przekrój".

BORYS FILONENKO

Curator, art critic, and editor-in-chief of ist publishing (Kharkiv–Kyiv–Khmelnytskyi). He was a co-curator of the Pavilion of Ukraine at the 59th Biennale di Venezia (2022), the Second National Biennale of Young Art (Kharkiv, 2019), and the Pavilion of Ukraine at the 18th Biennale Architettura in Venice. In 2015–2018 he was a curator of "Come in" art gallery in Kharkiv. In 2017–2023, he was a lecturer and curator at the Humanities Department, Kharkiv School of Architecture. He lives and works in Kyiv, Lviv and Kharkiv.

ARTUR WABIK

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

INGA HAJDAROWICZ

Sociologist, PhD student at the Institute of Sociology, Faculty of Philosophy of Jagiellonian University. Her research interests focus on the issues of participatory democracy, grassroots initiatives, feminist movements and migration. She studies grassroots strategies to support refugee women, focusing on the activities of selected Syrian initiatives in Lebanon.

JOANNA KUSIAK

PhD holder, researcher in the field of urban planning and urban studies at the University of Cambridge, King's College. In 2011–2012, she was a visiting researcher at the City University of New York. In 2012, her book "Chasing Warsaw. Socio-Material Dynamics of Urban Change after 1990" (co-authored by Monika Grubbauer) was published, followed by "Chaos Warszawa. Porządki przestrzenne polskiego kapitalizmu" (Chaos Warsaw. Spatial orders of Polish capitalism) in 2018. In 2023, she received the prestigious Nine Dots Prize.

NATALIA RACZKOWSKA

Architect, graduate of the University of Arts in Poznań. She runs the "Czytanie przestrzeni" ("Reading of space") program at Raczyński Library in Poznań.

ROSARIO TALEVI

Architect, curator, editor and educator interested in critical spatial practice, transformative pedagogy, and feminist futures. In 2019–2022, she co-led Floating University, where she is currently the curator of the Urban Practice program and the Climate Care festival. Founding member of Soft Agency, a diasporic group of architects, artists, curators, researchers and writers dealing with spatial practices. She lives in Berlin.

GILLY KARJEVSKY

Curator of programs in the fields of ecology, care ethics, and radical collectivity. She is a founding member of the Floating University Berlin association, where she is responsible for the Climate Care: Theory and Practice festival and the Urban Practice residency program. Together with Rosario Talevi, she is a founding member of Soft Agency and co-director of 72 Hour Urban Action.

DOROTA JĘDRUCH

Works at the Department of the History of Modern Art at the Institute of Art History, Jagiellonian University. She defended her PhD thesis on the subject of three models of French social architecture in the 20th century, represented by Le Corbusier, Émile Aillaud and Ricardo Bofill. Curator of architectural exhibitions, educational programs, and activities that popularise art history. Member of the board of the Institute of Architecture Foundation.

JAKUB SZCZĘSNY

Works at the intersection of architecture, design and art, in Western Australia, the United States, Kazakhstan, and Brazil, among other places. In 2013, he earned his PhD from the Faculty of Design of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. He conducts workshops and guest lectures at the School of Form in Poznań, Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem, University of South Pacific, New School and GSAPP. Since 2016, he has been running his own studio, SZCZ, in Warsaw (www.szcz.com.pl).

ZOFIA PIOTROWSKA

Architect and urban planner, she deals with the issue of available housing and land resources. She pursues doctoral research at the Warsaw University of Technology, focusing on post-war housing cooperatives in Warsaw. Member of the editorial board of "Rzut" quarterly.

WOJCIECH MAZAN

Architect and co-founder of PROLOG design studio. As a PROSTUDIO member, he co-curated the "Trouble in Paradise" exhibition, which addresses rural issues, in the Polish Pavilion at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition in Venice. Member of the editorial board of "Rzut" quarterly.

ZUZANNA KASPERCZYK-BRODECKA

Architect, researcher, graduate of the Faculty of Architecture of Kraków University of Technology. A PhD student at Poznań University of Technology, she deals with the problem of urban wastelands and strategies for temporary use of space in the context of revitalisation. As part of the scholarship of the capital city of Warsaw for PhD students, she is conducting a research project on the identification and valorisation of the city-forming effects of the temporary development and use of urban plots for cultural purposes.

PIOTR CHUCHLA

Graphic designer, graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw. He cooperates with cultural institutions, implementing publications, exhibitions and visual identification projects. Editorial designer for "Autoportret" quarterly.

KIRA PIETREK

Poet nominated for the "Nike" Literary Award. She also deals with graphics, illustrations and advertising.

Quarterly
of Małopolska
Institute of Culture
in Krakow

ISSN 1730–3613
INDEKS 362816