

Study visit to Vrtule, Pacific, Jedna Trojka and Jizni Pol - Prague, Czech Republic

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CAS – DESCRIPTION OF THE ORGANISATION, TARGET SERVICE USERS, AND CONDITIONS:

Czech Association of Streetwork (CAS) is the national umbrella organisation for streetwork with youngsters and youth and other target groups. It brings together programmes and organisations that carry out social work with service users in different parts of the Czech Republic (youngsters and youth in public spaces, youth clubs, mobile facilities and so on). CAS' services extend to areas of education, counselling, combating social issues, and international cooperation. CAS connects 90 organisations and programmes of various sizes.

The Restart Shop is a project founded by CAS in 2014. It targets young people with lower socioeconomic backgrounds who are unable to find employment. They offer young people a 'reintegration-oriented form of employment' on a temporary basis (half a year with the possibility of extension). Any potential surplus funds are directed towards low-threshold youth clubs. CAS is funded largely by cohesion funds (through a national agency) from Erasmus+ programmes, private donations (e.g. Velux), and membership fees.

Given the information we were presented, we can conclude that the participation of state and local stakeholders in funding and other forms of support is extremely weak, which may consequently affect the quality and potential scope of the services.

OUR MEETING WITH CAS:

We visited CAS at the start and end of our job shadowing.

On our first visit to the organisation headquarters, we met our hostess (Karolína Panušková) and went through the weekly schedule and our reporting duties. Since we already knew the organisation from our previous collaborations, and a member of our group, Anja Manja, had spent a year in Prague as an exchange student, we already knew the logistic details. Our meeting was short (one hour), as we were already due to visit our first organisation (Vrtule) at 2 p.m.

On the last day of our job shadowing, we had a reflection meeting with the host organisation. We discussed the next steps in our project, as we will be hosting a Czech team in Slovenia in September 2020.

Karolína encouraged us to be critical during our evaluation and identify practices which we think could (with better funding etc.) offer young people even more support in entering adulthood and active citizenship.

Our impressions of CAS are largely positive, as we lack such a national association in Slovenia. We recognise the importance of an umbrella organisation, especially in the possibilities offered by a centralised transfer of knowledge and experience, networking possibilities for social workers, and the exchange of good practices.

We want to draw attention to the potential that a strong stakeholder like CAS can realise in a democratic social system with the support of national and local communities. First and foremost, we want to emphasise the importance of collecting data, e.g., for understanding the effects of services on the target group, comparing the specifics of local communities, etc. Another potential benefit is in the organisation of training courses, with CAS' participation in several international networks and the accumulated experience of many veteran street workers representing excellent possibilities for knowledge transfer. With such resources we could eliminate the large differences in our approaches and transfer good practices and experience into other environments more quickly and efficiently.

OUR MEETING WITH THE RESTART SHOP:

On the last day of our study visit, we learned about the Restart Shop, an employment-focused solution aimed at helping people from vulnerable social groups gain their first work experience. We certainly applaud the model of this social service, but during the presentation we realised that systemic support for it is completely negligible. On the one hand, the local community doesn't provide free facilities (which we consider to be the minimum-basic contribution of the local community); on the other hand, the government (in this case, the Ministry of Social Affairs) doesn't provide financial support for the employment of 'vulnerable service users'.

During the presentation, we recognised another important role that CAS plays, namely in including vulnerable groups in social life, as well as its importance in providing funds. The Velux donations provide many services in various fields with at least the minimum funds for operation.

NOTE:

Throughout the text we refer to participants in social and street work activities, i.e. the young people that workers meet during their work in the field (CAS calls them 'clients'), as service users.

VRTULE

We spent the first three days of our visit at the Vrtule Youth Club, which operates within the Salesian Youth Centre.¹ The youth centre hosts various services for children, youngsters, youth, families, and others. In addition to the Vrtule Youth Club, the large building contains the youth centre itself, a family centre, several classrooms, a chapel, an apartment for priests, an auditorium, a playground, a climbing wall, ramps for scooters and skateboards, and more. All of the services are based on the Don Bosco education system, and the spaces, with the exception of the Vrtule Youth Club, all contain Catholic symbols (e.g., crosses, iconography, Bible quotes).

The entrance to Vrtule is separate from the other services and leads directly out onto the street. We followed some stairs down to a pleasant semi-basement area with a small stage, some sofas and bean bags, a surprising number of table football tables, and a bar where we got our coffee. The atmosphere was very homely and reassuring. We sat down on the sofas with two other social workers and began the presentation. The presentation itself was interactive, we exchanged realities, compared the context of our work, our target groups, our approaches. We spent the next three days with the social workers of Vrtule. We got to know the organisational structure, as well as the concrete work practices, the field work, the cooperation with schools. Before describing the concrete practices, we will highlight the most important insights from the introductory presentation, which we think will help the reader understand our experience.

The Vrtule youth club runs **low-threshold programmes**. A low threshold means service users have easy access to the services and is based on four main principles:

- 1 Anonymity means that they don't need to collect service users' personal information; e.g., individuals' nicknames are sufficient for keeping records. In contrast, the Salesian Youth Centre keeps track of the personal information of every service user, including their photograph, residence information, information about their parents, etc. Our own practice is somewhere in between. Funders oblige us to report the age structure of our participants, and the latter have to sign an attendance list, but they can use nicknames instead of their given names and surnames.
- 2 Accessibility means easy and unrestricted access to the club. Each individual can decide when to participate in activities and how long to stay in the club; they can be

¹ For more information, visit <https://www.strediskokobylisy.cz/klub-vrtule>.

- there for five minutes or for as long as the club is open. They also don't have to plan or announce their participation in advance.
- 3 Free service is also a principle of low-threshold programmes. Again, we noticed a different approach at the youth centre, which collects an annual fee—a small one, but nevertheless—for access to the various materials and requisites, such as board games, scooters, and rollerblades.
 - 4 Voluntary participation means that service users aren't referred to a service, but decide to participate voluntarily and autonomously.

The services offered by the Vrtule Youth Club are considered social services and are funded primarily by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Other sources of funding are the City of Prague and private donors, though the former reduced its funding by $\frac{3}{4}$ at the start of 2020. Programmes funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs are required to be low-threshold. Conversely, this does not apply to the youth centre, since it is funded by the Ministry of Education, which has a higher threshold, requires collection of more of the participants' personal information, etc. This distribution of services is interesting when compared to the situation in Slovenia, which is somewhat reversed. Programmes funded by the Slovenian Ministry of Education are normally based on voluntary participation and do not require gathering information or reporting on the participants. Social programmes, on the other hand, require extensive reporting on the participants, who are often processed beforehand and referred to the services by other institutions, such as social centres; therefore, they are not based on voluntary participation.

The team at Vrtule consists of five social workers, four of whom are employed full-time and one part-time. This team of five carries out the youth club's programme and street work, which covers both of the mobile units described below (Vrtulka and Heliport), as well as outreach work (patrolling the neighbourhoods, establishing and maintaining contact, encouraging participation in activities, etc.). One team member acts as a leader/manager, coordinating the various activities and providing administrative support. Some team members are more "grounded" in the youth club, while others mostly work in the streets.

There is a major difference compared to the practices we know in Slovenia, where such services tend to be project-based, fragmented and unconnected. Vrtule offers a continuous service, overseen by a single team with regular meetings and supervisions. The service they provide is more cohesive, with more consistency in the activities as well as user treatment.

In 2019 they engaged 111 service users, about half of them through the youth club and half through street work. Some participants engage in both forms of their services, which we were able to see in practice. Engagement is based on an oral agreement with the service user, a

contract prescribed by the law, which defines the user's rights as well as what they can expect from social workers. This marks, perhaps, another important difference from Slovenian practices, where youth centres primarily keep track of participation on an activity basis, which results in significantly higher numbers (i.e., a participant in a single short activity already counts as a service user). The amount of time spent on each user speaks significantly to the continuity and comprehensive approach of the Vrtule team: in 2019, they spent more than 3000 hours in direct contact with young people, which adds up to just under 30 hours per individual.

The youth club is open to service users four days a week in the afternoon, from Monday to Thursday, with Friday being their 'office day'. Opening hours are spent socialising, playing table football, hanging out, as well as having structured conversations (e.g., on the topic of the month) and individual counselling (for this purpose they also have a room where a social worker and young service user can talk one on one). In the following sections we describe Vrtulka and Heliport, and the part of our programme that was more related to street work and cooperation with schools.

VRTULKA

On the first day of our visit to the Vrtule Youth Club, the social workers invited us to do street work with them. Together with two other social workers, we made our way to the nearest bus station, rode three stops and got off in a neighbourhood densely packed with gigantic apartment blocks. This residential neighbourhood is one of the most densely populated in Prague and is also home to its longest apartment block. The Vrtule Youth Club has a small branch here called Vrtulka. Vrtulka is an old circus wagon, converted into a youth room. It is located on a small playground surrounded by blocks in the immediate vicinity of the bus stop. A sign hanging from the wagon announces that Vrtulka is open twice a week for four hours.

One of the social workers set off by himself on a circular route through the neighbourhood, while the other waited for participants in the small mobile base. Vrtulka is equipped with folding chairs, a couch, table football, and a board game or two. The social workers also bring some of their own materials with them when they go there. The walls are covered in informational posters about homelessness, the theme of the month in Vrtule, Vrtulka, and Heliport (another small centre located on a school playground). The best thing—though this may be subjective since we were there during the winter—is a small gas stove heating up the whole space. The place is small and pleasant, and young people like to hang out there. The day of our visit was no exception. The work that the social workers do there is based primarily on conversations and discussions with the youth. We introduced some of our own activities, which brought us closer together despite the

language barrier. When opening hours ended and Vrtulka closed, the young people were invited to the youth club, and some of them responded to the invitation.

We were impressed by the Vrtule Club's practice of doing street work out of a field base, i.e. Vrtulka, and we think it is transferable to our own environment. Vrtulka itself doesn't have the latest equipment, but it is warm, comfortable, and relaxed, and we can see why young people like being there. We also think it's an excellent opportunity to address certain topics with the youth, particularly in neighbourhoods with no other infrastructure for young people.





HELIPORT

On the second day of our visit to Vrtule, we attended the opening of their second field base, Heliport – a small, mobile wooden house set up in the grounds of a primary school. The school itself is a good 10–15 minutes' walk from the Vrtule Club and is therefore suitable as a second field base. The small wooden house contains a sofa, chairs and a table, and is divided into two sections by an interior door, which also enables individual work. Setting up Heliport is seen as a great success by the Vrtule team, as having a streetwork base in a school area isn't common practice in the Czech Republic. They attribute the realisation of this arrangement to the persistent networking of their director, as well as the good connections he has with district and school officials. The director told us that they are very lucky to be met with approval for their work, as well as an understanding of the importance of field work with youth in general. The goal behind Heliport is to provide a base where social workers and young people can hang out even in colder weather or when they need a place for more private conversation.

The Vrtule team hope that this new base will strengthen their outreach work by increasing their reach among the youth of the school. Like Vrtulka, the mobile house will have its own opening hours, presumably twice a week. The youth will eventually be invited to join the Vrtule Club.

Significantly, a girl we had met the day before in Vrtulka also attended the Heliport opening and, after speaking with a social worker, followed us back to the Vrtule Club. Gathering young people in the field and going back to the club with them is something we don't yet do in Slovenia, but it seems to be good practice. We also find that their habit of having a pair of workers in the field, while another pair stays at the club, works very well. Just like in the club, the social workers in the field already seemed to have a constructive relationship with many of the youth. The opening of Heliport was attended mostly by regular participants, as well as some reporters, school officials, and the entire Vrtule team. The latter brought snacks and warm tea, a table football table and a grill, though the wind made it too cold for a barbecue. After an hour or so, we decided to play a game of table football with the youth and social workers, but a snowstorm prevented us from finishing. Wet and cold, we hid in Heliport and chatted for another hour or so.

The setting up of Heliport is a practice that could potentially be implemented in the Slovenian context, especially considering the fact that we tend to work in districts with a severe lack of infrastructure and leisure activities for young people. In this sense, it can be an alternative to a youth centre. It is also affordable (10,000 eur) and, as a mobile house, doesn't require various building permits, etc.



PACIFIC

On the fourth day of our visit we split into three smaller groups and visited three different organisations. One of them is the low-threshold Pacific Club, located in the Praha 14 district. The neighbourhood itself is close to the metro station Rajska Zahrada, which was built as an extension of the B metro line in 1998, so it is well connected to the rest of the city. At first glance, the view of the neighbourhood is dominated by apartment blocks, built in the 1970s and 80s, with the occasional shop here and there, and not much else in terms of infrastructure. The apartments there are relatively affordable.

Upon arrival, the social workers explained that the neighbourhood has a somewhat socially disadvantaged population, and there is also a comparatively large proportion of immigrants and Roma. The average composition of the visitors of their club reflects this. As a low-threshold club, they are intended for people who are socially vulnerable, come from dysfunctional families, display or are developing patterns of risky behaviour, and consequently have little opportunity for quality leisure time. Their target group of service users is limited between the ages of 6 and 18. We were told that the upper age limit used to be set at 20 years, but they found that there was an excessive age difference between their service users which also resulted in too much variety in their needs, so they lowered it down to 18 years.

Despite the fact that they address a more vulnerable population, their promotional leaflets and posters display well-posed questions that encourage people to visit the club, e.g.: Do you want to talk, but have no one to talk to? Are you bored and want to experience something? Are you looking for a place where you can express your views and opinions? Do you need advice or support in dealing with your parents, school, doctor...? Beyond the requirements of low-threshold programmes, they follow the principles of respect, dignity, an individual approach and independence of social workers.

The club itself is situated inside the building of the Motylek Community Centre, which is dedicated to children with health problems and also runs a social activation service. The building is in the geographical heart of the neighbourhood, in the immediate vicinity of the local primary school. The names of the services make it clear that this is a place for the socially disadvantaged. It's hard to say whether this effectively attaches a stigma to the building. The infrastructure is fairly modern and the building has its own small courtyard and playground. The inside of the Pacific Club isn't very spacious, but they do have access to a larger space for group activities, accessible bathrooms for disabled users, a hallway, and an office which doubles as a room for individual consultations with service users. They also have lockers in the hallway where service users can

store their outdoor clothes and personal belongings while they're at the club. Having lockers for service users is a practice we noticed at every organisation we visited, but which we are not familiar with in Slovenia.

The Pacific Club itself was closed on the day of our visit, as the team were doing field work at the nearby school, which was also the focus of our interest. The club's cooperation with the school is a relatively new practice—they have been doing it for a little over a year—which became apparent as we were left waiting for a good ten minutes before someone came and opened the door for us. In the meantime, several school employees had walked around us indifferently, uninterested in why we were waiting around. This was in spite of the fact that the social workers from Pacific visit the school regularly, every Thursday at the same hour. Our hosts were aware that the school's attitude towards them was inappropriate at this point, and the waiting made them visibly uncomfortable, especially because of our visit. In any case, we arrived at the school around noon, during classes so that we had time prepare for the longer break ahead. Despite the bad first impression, we were impressed by the fact that they managed to get a room at the school, which is dedicated exclusively to individual work with service users who go to school there. The room is bright and pleasant, equipped with hammocks, didactic material and creative props. Its purpose is to serve as a place for private individual conversations with service users, always at the users' initiative. We talked about the many difficulties and negotiations the club went through to get a dedicated room at the school, and we agreed that such things always require individual arrangements with school representatives, as well as a good deal of understanding about this kind of work on their part. It is a similar situation when introducing collaborations between street-based youth workers and schools in Slovenia. Such collaborations are almost exclusively based on mutually understanding relationships between the individuals involved, as well as a readiness on the part of school officials to work with outside service providers. In other words, we are far from a systemic arrangement.

Before the break, the social workers set up small bean bags in the hall and put up a poster with information about Pacific. The two of us kept our distance during the break, so as not to negatively surprise the approaching children and youngsters with our presence. The students gathered freely and a group formed immediately at the start of the break. They already seemed to know both of the social workers, even by name, and most of the youngsters already seemed to have a relationship with them. Despite the successful turnout, we couldn't help noticing the somewhat awkward layout of the meeting, with the social workers' bean bags being much larger than the ones meant for service users and placed in the centre with the others surrounding them. This

placement emphasised the sense of hierarchy and power imbalance that we as youth workers should want to avoid as much as possible. Nevertheless, another group of children gathered during the next break and took up all the available seating, and soon one of the students asked to have an individual conversation with a social worker inside the room. While they talked, the other social worker continued working with the group outside. He also managed to direct three of the students to us. Because they were immigrant children who spoke English much more confidently than their peers, we had a chance to interact with them directly. The service users stayed with us and the social workers till the end of the break, when they had to leave. Afterwards, the social workers filled out their reports, where they noted with whom they were in contact that day, what they spoke about, as well as any professional observations. They explained that this was a good example of an outreach approach, where they make contact and build a relationship with a vulnerable target group in the school, and then encourage them to follow up by visiting the Pacific Club.

The practice we observed is an upgrade from the practices of youth workers during school breaks that we know from the Netherlands, because they have access to their own space in the school. This model is interesting to us and potentially transferable to locations where we do field work in and around school areas, though we believe it would be better implemented as an outreach approach, i.e. when the base institution, in our case the youth centre, is geographically close to the school. We began a similar process last year, though less focused on targeting vulnerable groups, when we visited a secondary school in which we also hope to get a room that can act as a partially autonomous space, where the students will be able to dictate what goes on and what activities are held.



We visited Pacific again on the last day of our visit, where we hung out with children and youngsters during opening hours. Together we decorated cookies and rewarded the best three with symbolic presents. We recognised some of the service users from the individual meetings that the social workers held after the field work at the school, which made our interaction somewhat easier since we already knew some background, though our communication was still made difficult by the language barrier.

JednaTrojka Club

JednaTrojka is a low-threshold centre located in Prague's thirteenth district. It is an organisational unit of Proxima Sociale. Its main target group is young people aged 11 to 19 who live in the district. JednaTrojka employs two social workers and one educational worker. They work directly with service users, with administrative support from the Proxima Sociale headquarters. They cooperate closely with the district office in Prague 13, though the funding for their services mostly comes from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Additionally, JednaTrojka has a good working relationship with several schools, shopping centres and libraries in the district.

We were hosted by two social workers. During our visit we had the opportunity to explore the streets and other public spaces of Prague 13. We also got to see how the youth centre works. Multiple times per week, the JednaTrojka team does outreach work in a district library for two hours and street work for five hours. The youth centre itself is open four times a week for five hours, and once a week exclusively for individual counselling. They also run educational workshops at schools, as well as an emergency assistance residence programme, though we didn't have the opportunity to see those programmes in action. At the beginning of our visit, we took a moment to discuss our roles and expectations, which ended up being very helpful later on.

During the first part of our visit, we went out with the social worker to explore the neighbourhood. In Prague's district 13, many youngsters spend their time outside on the streets, in the parks, and in the shopping centres. Therefore, the social workers head out into these spaces several times a week, where they spend up to five hours a day. The street worker we were with wasn't wearing a uniform or carrying any educational materials. The neighbourhood consists of huge living complexes, inhabited, in the social worker's words, by middle class families. Most of those families have an immigration background, mostly from Russia and Ukraine. During our walk, the street worker told us about a case where the residents were being bothered by the noise and music coming from the youngsters who gathered in public spaces in the neighbourhood. The residents' council reacted by removing the benches, which is bad practice. Thus the street workers often mediate between the council and the youngsters, which is commendable.

We also joined a social worker in the public library, which is located inside a shopping centre and where the JednaTrojka team does outreach work several days a week. The social worker prepared info materials and some board games for the outreach work. A group of girls was already waiting for us at the library. The social worker addressed different topics during the conversations and while playing board games. However, we noticed that some topics were being treated as taboo. For example, while playing Life Game, a game with different coloured cards about different life topics and questions, the social worker removed the cards with the topic of sex from the deck. We think this is not a good practice, as it sends a message that talking about sex lives is not normal. By doing this, the social worker is also missing the chance to take on the role of an educator in cases where a topic provokes a mixed response.

After finishing with the outreach work, we returned to the JednaTrojka Club. The youngsters from the library came shortly after us. We find it great that the social workers from JednaTrojka managed to motivate and inspire youngsters from the library to join them in the club as well.



JIŽNI POL

Jižni Pol is a youth club, and it is also an organisational unit of Proxima Sociale. Proxima Sociale is one of the largest organisations in the field of social work with young people in Prague. Founded in 1993, its mission is to improve the quality of life of residents and empower them to overcome various life challenges. Jižni Pol is located in the Southern part of Prague, in a neighbourhood with a large number of apartment blocks. The neighbourhood itself doesn't have a bad reputation, on the contrary, the social workers describe it as a middle-class neighbourhood. After taking the metro to the last stop, we waited for a city bus and rode three more stops. Our phone navigation led us across a small park to a large old complex, located by the main road, yet surrounded by buildings. We then called Eva, a social worker, who guided us over the phone, past the local store and up the stairs of the complex. We were met by four young social workers, two women and two men, who gave us a warm welcome. We took the stairs to the top floor to find ourselves entering a different atmosphere. Although the top floor is outdoors and acts as a sort of terrace, the hustle and bustle of the city subsides once you reach it. We walked past the walls of graffiti and found ourselves at the entrance of the youth club, which we entered with curiosity. Inside, you can tell by the graffiti on the walls that it is a young people's space. We sat down on a large sofa and the social workers told us about Proxima Sociale.

We learned that they work in various fields of social work and provide social services, such as a residence programme that provides temporary family housing, an intervention centre, and a resocialisation-activation programme for families. They also have programmes for children and youth, specifically addressing dropouts and young offenders. They work with a probation office with the goal of resocialising young first-time offenders. In addition to these two programmes, they also have educational programmes in schools. They run workshops for youngsters and youth in

primary and secondary schools, training sessions for professionals and teachers, and volunteer programmes. The employees are mostly social workers with experience working with young people, though one of them emphasised that he is a musician with an interest in social work and youth work, and is trying to gain experience.

The Jižni Pol Club itself acts as a low-threshold programme, meaning that participation is voluntary, anonymous, and free of charge. The club's users are young people between the ages of 11 and 20, while the target group for outreach street work is youngsters and youth between the ages of 11 and 26. As a club, they emphasise educational activities and including young people in processes of empowerment. They also organise an annual community event with up to 500 participants. The graffiti that surrounds the club has a special importance to them. They explain that graffiti art is a notable tradition in the Southern part of Prague where they operate. Thus the social workers also keep track of the graffiti on the designated surfaces where it is allowed. They also regularly post pictures of new graffiti on social media. The club itself is open four days a week, and the team also works in the field every day. Two social workers stay in the club in the afternoon, while the other two go into the field to do street work. They also have a presence in the local school, where they organise workshops for the students as well as doing street work during the main break. We had the opportunity of seeing all three practices in action.

After the presentation, we quickly made our way to the school. It was important not to miss the hour-long main break, when the youth could be caught as they were leaving the school. We wondered whether anyone would even show up outside the school, it was winter after all, but we were told that the school sends them out to wait for the next lessons, as it doesn't provide care during the main break. The social workers described their cooperation with the professional at the school as excellent. They told us that she was the key person who understood what they were trying to achieve with their work, and that they hadn't been met with this kind of understanding at a different school where they had worked before. They also have meetings with the school every 3 to 4 months, which allows regular contact with the school professional. At the meetings, they go through their field work schedules, evaluate their work so far, and discuss how they could improve.

Out on the field, we split into two teams. One team went to the elementary-level grades while the other waited for the older students. We had some circus props and a frisbee with us. When the bell rang, the students poured out of the school. It was obvious that they already knew and trusted the social workers, because they approached us right away. We talked about various things, above all they were interested in where we come from and why we were there. One of the boys developed an intense relationship and agreed to visit us in the afternoon when the club opened. When the bell rang again, our work was finished and we headed out for lunch. Soon after lunch,

the club opened and the workers went out into the field. The boy we met earlier at the school also came by.

Work in the club was relaxed. It was apparent that the participants were regulars at the club and felt good there. They were mostly young boys, though later on some older participants, and one girl, also came in. The social worker connected with them mainly over board games that she knew well and was able to adapt to the participants. We also use board games in our work, and we stick to the principle that you need to know a game well enough to know how to adapt it. A group of youngsters played Fifa on the Playstation, one of the social workers played the guitar, a young service user sang along.

We also went out with the field team. We discovered that they walk quite a long path, around 12 km, during which they try to engage the youth. Unfortunately, because it was winter, there weren't many young people out. They also have a rule not to engage couples and larger groups. This was different from our approach, as we tend to engage anyone and everyone we feel we can approach. We talked about another aspect of our own approach, which is to have only one social worker go up to a pair of participants, while the other keeps their distance.

Our path takes us through the park to the neighbourhood school, where the social worker tells us that they often find used needles lying around. In such cases they call the police, who come to remove the needles. After walking in the park, we made our way towards the largest shopping mall in Central Europe. On the way, we talked about how they could improve their approach to outreach street work. We suggested that street work aimed at engaging young people over such a large area might not be the most effective way of reaching the target group. We also pointed out that we couldn't really tell what the purpose of their street work was. During their street work, they tend to also address older people that can't be invited back to the club, and we suggested that it might be a good idea to set up a mobile base to work out of. This would mean spending the first two hours of their street work walking around the neighbourhood, encouraging the youth to join the activities taking place at a certain location outside (at the mobile base). This way, their activities would be more focused on detached street work and less on outreach. This could allow them to establish deeper and more regular connections with the young people in the area. They would also be more visible if they wore a recognisable uniform.

Our path led us from the park to the metro station. We took the metro to the shopping centre. The management of this shopping centre had designated a special area for young people, which was being rented by a Czech music TV station. The social workers have an agreement with the management, who gave them permission to be there. When we arrived, however, all we saw was lots of young people hanging out in a room full of videogames and arcade games, and a hostess

at the door whose job was to warn them that eating, drinking and smoking were forbidden inside. Unfortunately, the TV network and shopping centre management haven't shown much interest in letting the social workers organise activities that would address young people hanging out there, and wouldn't just be directed conversation. We hope that these stakeholders will pay attention to the social workers before serious problems arise. We see that room as a great opportunity for engaging the youth. A lot of young people hang out there, they feel good, and yet they are left to themselves despite being in a shopping mall and not in an outdoor public space. We went over to the side entrance, where lots of young people smoke cigarettes. We approached two of them and the social workers engaged them. They were willing to answer a questionnaire about alcohol use among young people. We also asked them about substances and what tends to be used at parties, and they mentioned synthetic substances and soft drugs. When we left, the social worker told them to use substances responsibly. On the way back to the club, we did a final evaluation of our visit. We exchanged impressions and parted with the mutual satisfaction of having gained something new.

Our general impression of Jižni Pol is that it is run by a fairly young and inexperienced team who are eager to learn, improve, and try out various approaches. Because they are young themselves, they tend to favour a peer approach to participants. Fundamentally, this makes it easier for them to develop a relationship, but also that much harder to set boundaries. We also noticed a lack of professional support from the superiors in the organisation. They reported being heavily overloaded with administrative duties and not being able to find time for additional education and training. With additional training in the field of outreach street work, they could establish a system of street work that would reach the target group more effectively. We were very impressed with the practice of working in the school. We hope to establish a similar practice of field work during main breaks, though we are limited by the fact that the main break in Ljubljana schools usually takes place inside and only lasts up to 25 minutes. We do meet with our partner school more often than they do with theirs, however, and we also bring our youth work activities into regular classes. In general, there are differences between Zavod Bob and Jižni Pol in the starting points of our work vs. theirs. Because our background is in youth work, everything we do is based on empowering and activating young people. We try to include them in all the processes that take place at our youth centre. Jižni Pol, on the other hand, is grounded in social work, and run by social workers who spend more time with participants one on one, and focus more on vulnerable youth and their problems. Furthermore, we are a small organisation where the employees all know each other well, whereas Jižni Pol is a unit of a much larger organisation, which also brings along with it a more rigid structure of work.

Our visit left us with mixed feelings. We are glad that the team welcomed us with open arms and was willing to include us into their regular work process and share information with us. We gained very valuable insights into our own organisational practices, street work approaches and partnerships with schools. We would have liked to spend even more time with this team, include them in our own work process and explore with them what they could change in the way they do street work, so that they could find something that better suits them as an organisation, the environment they work in and, above all, their service users.