

LJUBLJANA – STUDY VISIT REPORT

June 2021

Miloš Březina (Prostor plus, o.p.s.), Jáchym Elliot Kolouch (Proxima Sociale, o.p.s.), Magdaléna Matoušková (Proxima Sociale, o.p.s.), Anna Švarcová (YMCA Praha), Renáta Turoňová (Bunkr, o.p.s.)

INTRODUCTION

This report represents a summary of all the activities and findings from the study visit to Ljubljana, which took place from the 7th to the 11th of June 2021 and was attended by five social workers from all over the Czech Republic. The study visit took place mainly in the Zavod BOB organization, in cooperation with other organizations who do streetwork.

The workers of Zavod BOB prepared a busy programme for us. We had the opportunity to visit all of the places where they work in Ljubljana (streetwork in Metelkova Street, the LivadaLAB community garden, streetwork in Savskasreda, the ULCA Youth Centre), some of us participated in an online workshop with the MC ZOS organization, we had a chance to see how the Ljubljana organization Skala works, and on the last day we became part of the NEXTival festival, a youth festival for young people production organized every year by Zavod BOB.

Zavod BOB – introduction to the organization

Guides: Matjaž, Anja Manja, Nežka

Participants of the study visit: all

Zavod BOB is a non-governmental non-profit organization founded in 2007. Its mission is to ensure the active participation in social events of those youngsters who do not have a public voice or whose voice is not heard.

Zavod BOB focuses on non-formal education, streetwork with youth, community work and cultural events. The activities, including streetwork, are not registered as social services. Children and young people are not called clients, but participants in activities and projects. According to the legislation, by law, they should work with youths aged 15 - 29. However, in practice the age range of participants is much wider, namely 10-35 years, with focus on young people at risk aged 15-25

The activities of this organization are covered by the Ministry of Education and also by the local municipality, i.e. Ljubljana's Youth Department/Section of the Municipality. Of course this also includes financing. Furthermore, specific projects are also funded from other sources.

Note: Looking for similarities with the Czech system, we would find it in activities taking place in community centres, perhaps in schools or open club activities, in the activities of some libraries, and of course in the activities of various non-profit organizations.

Background of the organization

The organization uses a 2-storey building that serves as a base for the workers and also for some activities (BOB). It also rents space in the underpass of the train station (Youth center ULCA) and a large plot of land outside of the city centre for the community garden project (LivadaLAB).



Photo – building – entrance to BOB

Staff

The work team is currently composed of 10–12 employees with one male employee complementing the female team. Most members of the team work full-time. Most of the staff joined the organization in a similar way – they started as volunteers/student gradually integrated into activities as paid workers and when they stabilized in a project, they become employed.

Historically, the work team grew gradually until, with 18–20 employees, the organization had to decide how to build an organizational structure allowing further effective management. They came to the decision that they did not want to form a steep, multi-tiered hierarchical structure. Instead, they wanted a flat organization with a low number of organizational units and a low number of management levels. Therefore, through a natural decline of workers, they gradually reduced the size of the team until they reached the current number of employees, which makes this structure possible. Thus, the team officially has a director, a statutory representative, but his role is significantly marginalised in practice, just as other special positions (e.g. project manager, PR officer, and administrative officer) are not established. On the contrary, each of the employees is responsible and competent to prepare, administer, implement and manage his/her activity or project in its full scope, of course with the support of colleagues.

As elsewhere, the workers attend joint meetings and they undertake further education. The team seems to be made up of highly motivated people. However, according to the director, the organization has also experienced exhaustion of employees, burnout and people leaving the team. As a result, they focus more on prevention and once symptoms are recognised, they actively plan rest and holidays with the worker.

Note: most developing Czech non-profit organizations face a similar decision about how to structure themselves organizationally, and they usually take a path of building a hierarchical structure. It was interesting to see a “flat” structure in practice. However, this model makes higher demands on workers, their skills and their personal maturity.

Operation – projects and activities

Its varied activities are divided into several areas:

- Youth Centre
 - BOB – a safe space for young people for self-development, activation, strengthening relationships and coping with various life challenges. It is open 6 days a week in the late afternoons.
 - ULCA – a space specifically for self-realization and expression through predominantly hip-hop culture - DJs - MCs - Breakdancing – Graffiti.
- Streetwork
 - Outreach work in several locations in the city (Metelkova Street, park, housing estate)
 - Networking – Mlada Street – coordinating a network of youth streetwork organizations
 - Connecting the local community – engaging the community in activities with children
- Non-formal education
 - Pogon – for unemployed young people aged 15 to 29 – job search support, skills development, career counselling
 - Theatre of the Oppressed – workshops using theatre methods and pedagogy for personal development and reflection regarding current social issues and topics
- Cooperation with schools
 - Outreach in primary schools
 - Cooperation with secondary schools (workshops in classes)
 - Offering training for teachers
- International projects
 - Volunteering – hosts international volunteers under European solidarity corps (up to 1 year)
 - Strategic partnerships – the organization is working with various foreign organizations in the area of streetwork and non-formal education
 - Foreign training, study visits
- For the public, for the community
 - LivadaLAB – open public space, enabling contact and work with the community
 - NEXTival – a youth festival created by young people

Theatre of the Oppressed

Guide: Metka

Participants of the study visit: all

On the first day of our visit, we all had the opportunity to experience for ourselves the techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed. The practice was combined with the theory, which represents one of the pillars of this technique – to experience and to feel, to put aside the rationale and be present “right here and right now”. Our guide Metka carried us away with her enthusiasm. First we started with warm-up and familiarization exercises that were all about cooperation and connection between participants. Eye contact and tuning in to each other represented a prerequisite for success. It must be said that it was great fun for all of us and the ice was immediately broken in the group. I was very impressed by an exercise where we had to use our body posture to demonstrate what “strength” means to us. Everyone associates something different with this phenomenon, so we were confronted with how differently everyone can think about the same thing. I feel this particular exercise has a great potential to reveal hidden group dynamics, bullying or any other oppression in a group.

Metka then put our experiences into a theoretical framework. The founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed was the Brazilian politician and theatre director Augusto Boal. He argued that Aristotelian ethics oppressed the masses of working people. They become mere spectators, literally and figuratively – he compared a Greek drama to today’s soap operas. He regarded them as a propaganda instrument of the government, especially when talking about the Brazilian government. Boal wanted to create a theatre through which people would actively explore and transform the reality in which they live. The Theatre of the Oppressed builds on breaking down the boundaries between spectators and actors. Spectators are actively drawn into the story and have opportunities to create the story. For example, a short scene from a school environment is shown to a group of children – the main protagonist faces unfair treatment from his classmates and teacher. This arouses unpleasant feelings among the spectators, who spontaneously become actors and create a story that is in line with their moral compass. They experience first-hand what it is like to be an active creator of the reality in which they live. Metka also referred us to literature useful if we choose to use the Theatre of the Oppressed model in our work with clients. Overall, I was very impressed with the Theatre of the Oppressed concept and I would like to find out more about it. I plan to use the techniques with our clients during experiential re-socialization stays.

ULCA Youth Centre – hip hop as a platform for youth work

Guide: Katarina

Participants of the study visit: all

Since 2016, Zavod BOB in collaboration with SKD Gor (hip hop culture association) has been operating the ULCA Youth Centre in the underpass of the main train station. It is a simple space, suitably furnished for dancing with sound, lights and a mirror wall. According to the workers, this rehearsal space is fairly busy throughout the week. The music heard in the underpass naturally invites others. Hip hop culture (breakdancing, graffiti, DJs, rap) seems to be very popular among young people here. The obvious proof is the abundance of graffiti everywhere in the city, including the historic centre. The workers use this language, understandable to young people, to establish contacts. Subsequently, participants gain information, develop skills and search for their own identity in an informal way. It is aimed at experimental learning, freedom, activities, teamwork and promotion of ideas.

The worker Katarina had prepared a detailed presentation about the history and development of hip hop culture, the development of music and the importance of reaking).



Photo – ULCA

ULCA also offers a base for other ideas and projects. An example is an “open sewing workshop”, where several participants meet to repair, re-stitch or creatively improve pieces of clothing once a week in the early evening. The organization then offers the adjusted clothes in the form of a small “social wardrobe”.

Metelkova streetwork

Guides: Anja Manja, Dora

Participants of the study visit: Miloš, Anna

The area next to Metelkova Street represents a phenomenon of an autonomous way of life and of defining oneself against the commercial, capitalist and state system. The history of Metelkova began in 1993 when the first squats, galleries and clubs began to emerge in the area of a former military barracks, rejecting affiliation to the institutionalised culture and to the majority society as such. The complex covers an area of 12, 500 m², some parts of which are not open to the public. There also used to be the ROG centre in Ljubljana, about 1 km away from Metelkova Street, which also profiled itself as an autonomous social and cultural centre. In the spring, however, the municipality decided to demolish it, which led to a series of conflicts between squatters and police and right-wing extremists; news of the incidents were published in the European media.

It was explained to us that streetwork in Metelkova is quite challenging. Dora and Anja Manja told us that youngsters of families in difficult life situations, youngsters at risk of poverty, migrants and those with a risky course of growing are stakeholders of the area. The autonomous area of Metelkova guarantees them a form of shelter and refuge, but at the same time increases the risk of substance abuse and, for girls, harassment by older visitors. Our guides shared with us other examples of risky phenomena towards youth and we were thinking of issues related to the responsibility of galleries and bar operators for the situations and environment in their surroundings. All this at a time when the area prepresents an alternative to the ‘unjust’ current system. Dora and Anja Manja mentioned a certain closed-mindedness of business operators towards the Metelkova Street outdoor environment.

Everything, in short, is happening behind the walls. They also pointed out that the area is becoming polarized into the territory of 'old' squatters and that of immigrants, between whom there is rivalry. Regarding cooperation with Zavod BOB workers or other services, opinion in some Metelkova clubs is that streetbased (they see it as social) work with young people should be handled by the services and they (clubs) should not bother with intervention while they are present. Local anarchists at the beginning represented an extreme example of the cooperation refusal. They justify the lack of communication by the fact that Zavod BOB is partly financed by the city and thus cooperates with the establishment they are fighting against. Without having any ambition to judge anything, I don't think I have ever encountered such a radical attitude. It seemed that doing streetwork in a location surrounded by an aureole of freedom requires a tactical approach.

We arrived at the site on Tuesday at around 2 p.m. The place seemed to be relatively empty, only at the LGBT centre were locals moving furniture and getting ready for its operation. We walked through the squat sector and into the immigrant sector, where a group of men in their 30s were kicking a ball and listening to loud reggae music. A man of African descent joined us and chatted nicely with us, assuming we were members of the streetwork harm reduction team, but when he realized that we weren't changing needles he promptly left. We returned to the old sector where the guides started to talk with a bar manager. He invited us in for a brief chat. Inside the bar, which was approximately 10 by 6 metres, there were musical instruments, a bar counter and a recording console. When asked when he would open, he replied: *"...I do not know, we are an illegal bar, let see what the constellation will be after the big demonstration on Friday, if we open at the wrong time, they might run in and we would have a problem. But we'll open anyway..."*

Outside the bar, Dora and Anja Manja met a group of teenagers with whom they already had contact. The group naturally accepted the workers and the contact was made in a relaxed atmosphere. We (participants of the study visit) moved away for a while and then, using skateboards, we made a contact with part of the group. During our entire stay we were surprised by the language skills of the Slovenians, so for standard conversation it was no problem to communicate. Our guides then said they considered the contact as a good one, they were mainly addressing motivations to complete school education, which is a common theme alongside discussions about prevention.



Photo 1 Metelkova Street

MC ZOS organization

6. 7. 2021

Online workshop with Nina and Sara

Participants of the study visit: Majda, Renáta, Jáchym

At the same time as the streetwork in Metelkova, an on-line workshop was happening with the MC ZOS organization – youth center that is based in the smaller town of Zagorje ob Savi. The organization is run by the municipality itself and creates a safe, open space for young people to spend their free time. It focuses mainly on non-formal education, volunteering and offers a counselling and information service. MC ZOS workers also actively cooperate with foreign participants of study visits/volunteers (European Solidarity Corps, formerly Erasmus+), which we have also noticed in other Slovenian organizations.

During the workshop we mainly shared good practice, and the participants of the study visit had a lot of opportunities to ask questions. We talked with Nina mostly about streetwork and how it works in their organization. The MC ZOS organization follows a rule of often giving something away when contacting new people on the street (e.g. making pancakes) and trying to offer something. They use an informal approach to make contacts, which also breaks the ice when they first meet. Another important aspect is regularity. The streetworkers go to the same places regularly and thus establish stronger contacts.

Skala organization

6.7. 2021

Guides: Kornelija (Skala), Anja Manja (BOB)

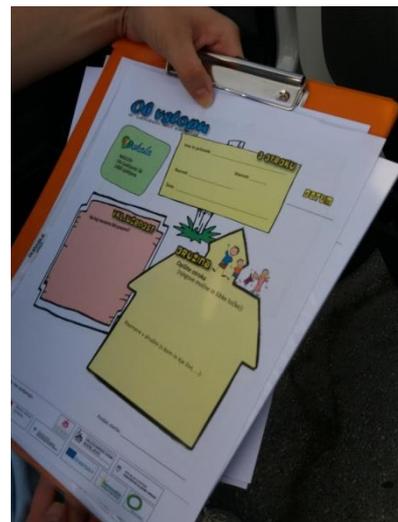
Participants of the study visit: all

In the late afternoon, we headed to the outskirts of Ljubljana to see the streetwork of the Skala organization. Skala has been working in Slovenia for 25 years and is one of the pioneers of local social work. The values of the organization are based on the Christian faith and it is affiliated with the Silesians of Don Bosco. The service we visited is called “Minibus veselja”, translated as “minibus of joy”, which focuses on children with migrant background living in one of the suburban housing estates. These families are mostly 2nd generation of migrants, who came mostly from the republics of former Yugoslavia. According to the Slovenians, the wave of African and Middle Eastern immigration has hardly impacted their country at all. Two workers and one volunteer from Uruguay were involved in working with about 30 children aged 8 to 15. Skala uses volunteers on a regular basis and thus is able to partly secure its operation. Afternoons with the children are usually spent by unloading a tent and various educational aids from the van, followed by informal education on a topic determined by consensus. The entire group is involved, with a prerequisite of an active approach that workers try to motivate. After the learning, a street basketball tournament was held. Leisure activities change every day, but the meetings (clubs) are conducted in a similar way: “learn and then play”. The approach to the children is dignified and educational. However, in comparison to the approach in the Czech Republic, one could speculate about different forms of the dilemma of favouritism and exclusion.

Workers treated some clients more familiarly than others, for instance hugging one child. Not all children could enjoy such privilege which may result in some rightly feeling that they were less accepted. At the same time, 'favoured' children may find it harder to cope with the eventual termination of the service, or a change of the worker, due to their own perception of the relationship, which they may beautify compared to the reality - a respectful and responsive worker relationship with clients.

This form of work seemed to mainly activate youngsters in order to spend meaningful leisure time, rather than having the ambition to tackle specific individual tasks.¹

Note: According to the Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, the visited streetwork programme has been recognised as a preventive social protection programme since 2010, which is comparable to the status of a registered social service in the Czech Republic. We had a very good opportunity to compare two types of streetwork programmes in Ljubljana. At first glance, "Minibus veselja" has very similar legal rules for working with clients – meeting with the interested person, concluding an agreement, individual planning, and reassessment. Planning and then evaluating is done with the team every day, together with keeping documentation and submitting regular reports and statistics to the Ministry. From my brief conversation with Kornelija, it struck me that during the discussion about using the service with the child they make an increased effort to contact parents as well and to introduce them to the service. Despite the fact that even here it is not obligatory to 'sign up' children to the programme. This seems to me to be a good practice, especially when working with younger children, when workers occasionally organize activities for parents with their children to get to know them better so that they can work for the benefit of the child. There is also a school on the housing estate that the streetwork programme tries to work with. Kornelija admits that cooperation is not always easy; the school listens better to some of the worker's suggestions for cooperation, and is rather unresponsive to others. This very generally described practice seems similar to the experience of many Czech services.



LivadaLAB

¹R.Turoňová: I cannot agree with this statement, even though it may have seemed to us like that.

Guides: Manneira, Mojca

Participants of the study visit: Anna, Magdaléna, Miloš, Jáchym, Renata

Classification: Community Work

During the study visit we had the opportunity to get acquainted with the LivadaLAB. The name of the project is composed of two words. Livada is the name of the area located near the city of Ljubljana. This area is known for its relatively abundant greenery and wet soil. LAB means laboratory. In this place, so-called experiments are carried out which are not focused on the result, but on the process that allows the learning of new skills. LivadaLAB is an urban green space that can be described as a garden full of trees, shrubs, plants, herbs and other greenery. In addition, a pleasant seating area, a shelter for gardening tools, a fireplace and an improvised playground with a volleyball net can be found in this place.

As participants of the study visit, we had the opportunity to learn about the garden through simple techniques. We were divided into pairs and half of us had our eyes covered. One of the pair became the guide and had to explain the way to the other one. When walking, the guide described what he/she was seeing and feeling. Then everyone took off their blindfolds and both roles (guide and guided) explained their experience. The reflection was followed by the presentation of the project.

The aim of this project is to improve the local environment and create a space where young people can spend their free time creatively and learn new skills. As already mentioned, the project aims to explain the process of growing to young people, not just the result in the form of ready food. The project enriches young people not only with information and skills, but also with opportunities that develop their independence and responsibility. The benefits of the project undoubtedly include fulfilment of the needs of young people and society as well. The project has a positive impact on the quality of local food production and the development of a healthy living space in the urban environment.

Workers of Zavod Bob, the City of Ljubljana, volunteers and follow-up institutions participated in the project. One of the inputs for the creation of LivadaLAB was finding that young people are not sufficiently involved in the planning and management of public spaces, despite the fact that these and similar places are used by young people. Participants meet professionals from several fields, including social work, architecture, construction, agronomy and forestry. Participation is free of charge for interested people.

The project has established cooperation with secondary schools. In the future, they would like to establish cooperation with a primary school located near the garden. They want to reach out to this school in particular, as there are migrants from the Balkans among the pupils, who are often socially excluded. Workers of Zavod Bob teach the children how it is possible to work with nature and available natural resources. Some workers would appreciate having animals such as chicken, geese, etc. on the property, but there would not be anyone to look after them during the summer holidays. They would like to motivate participants to take over this responsibility.

Unfortunately, the project was suspended during measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19. However, workers are now trying to re-establish new collaborations and attract new people to join the project.

The project started under international GREEN SURGE project. This project seeks to connect green spaces, natural assets and the people who draw on them.



Savsko naselje - streetwork

Guides: Sara, Nežka, Barb

Participants of the study visit: all

Savsko naselje is a residential housing estate area that BOB workers regularly visit twice every week for approximately 2–3 hours. They work with the whole local community with focus on youth to build a more pleasant environment for spending time.

Participants of the study visit helped to paint raised beds where flowers and herbs are grown, as well as to maintain the volleyball court. Together with the locals, we measured and painted the new sidelines on the court.

NEXTival

NEXTival is a community festival organized annually by Zavod BOB. The festival is free for everybody. The purpose of the festival is mainly to involve youth in organization of festival activities, enable them place for their expression and free-time production and to strengthen cooperation with them and with other organizations. At this year's festival there were several different workshops – capoeira, choral singing and breaking – that is, breakdancing. There was also a large water slide, a graffiti workshop and an art stall, as well as a stage on which all those who were interested could perform. Matjaž's popular pancakes represented an equally important part of the event.



CONCLUSION

The whole study visit was very inspiring, enriching and diverse. We had the opportunity to see how social work is done in a different country, in an organization that is structured differently. Zavod BOB differs from the organizations we work with in the Czech Republic primarily by its flat structure – not a hierarchical one. Small teams of about twelve employees work for Zavod BOB; they work on different projects in groups and each group is responsible for its own project.

BOB's work is also based on working with the community (e.g. Savsko naselje), where workers regularly go to selected locations to work with the entire community (both youth and adults) to create a more pleasant space to live in, e.g. repairing a playground and growing plants. In this way, they connect everyone who lives in the place and therefore builds relationships with each other. Regularity (in the sense of being in the same place and the same time on a regular basis) is something that could also be used in our streetwork. As well as taking the opportunity to interconnect the whole community of locals.

One of the most inspiring moments was definitely the cooperation of BOB with foreign volunteers. This not only enriches the organizations as such, but is also an attractive element for clients. They find foreign volunteers interesting and thus have the opportunity to practice their English casually. Last but not least, the clients broaden their horizons and feel part of a larger unit. I think that for a large

number of our clients, contacts with volunteers could be one of their few personal experiences with a different culture.

Another lesson we learned is "having something to offer". For example, Slovenian organizations use food in their first contact with clients. In practice, workers give out pancakes or muffins that they have baked themselves, thus engaging clients and creating a better space for first contact. By doing this, clients remember and recognise them better and perhaps approach them themselves.

We all learned a lot of new ideas that we want to apply in our future work. It is definitely desirable to have the opportunity to meet other organizations, be inspired and perhaps cooperate in the future. The whole team of Zavod BOB was available to us at any time, they were willing to answer all our questions and the cooperation with them was great in all aspects. Their team spreads really positive energy and basically they work like a big family – maybe that is the true meaning of social work.