

Study visit to Beztíže, Cesta integrace, and Neposeda – Prague, Czech Republic, November 2021

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The following report summarises all the experiences, thoughts and ideas gathered from the study visit.

Our first day started with a meeting with Karolína Panušková, who is the coordinator for international cooperation in ČAS. We met in DDM Praha 3 – Ulita building, which also houses one of the youth clubs – Beztíže.

ČAS is a professional non-profit organisation founded in 1997. It represents programs working in the field of low-threshold social services and contact social work. The programs include low-threshold centres for children and youngsters, contact centres for drug users, low-threshold advisory centres and street work. Street workers look for clients on the streets to establish contact and provide them with counselling and help to solve their adverse social situations. The job positions are determined by the Act of Social Services No. 108/2006 Coll. ČAS offers courses and seminars for many people, from beginners to experienced street workers. Both regular as well as tailor-made courses are provided. In conclusion, ČAS brings together all the organisations and programs in the Czech Republic to carry out different methods of social work with youngsters as well as other target groups.¹ ČAS also creates standards and methodologies, provides audits of quality, and supports supervision.

Ulita is a leisure centre which provides services for hobby education - there are programs for the active use of leisure time for children, youngsters and adults. The focus is on courses and hobby groups, events, open workshops, camps and holiday events, educational programs, and competitions for schools in Prague 3.²

Karolína briefly introduced us to the week's plan and other vital aspects of our trip. Then we headed to club Beztíže on the other side of the building. The staff of Beztíže, the Neposeda organisation, and Klub Cesta greeted us warmly. Karolína gave us a presentation on ČAS - how the organisation works, how they help children, youngsters and adults. We also learned about Beztíže.

Some noteworthy things: every year in September ČAS organises a low-threshold clubs' week to increase the visibility and openness of their clubs. The Youth Work Week in Estonia might

¹ <https://streetwork.cz/stranka/13/co-je-streetwork>

² <https://www.ulita.cz/>

be similar. It is organised every year in November with a topic important for youngsters (mental health, participation, youth work possibilities, etc.), but it is a clever idea to bring attention to the clubs themselves. We could use this method with our youth centres. There is also Časovaná bota or ‘time shoe’, an event dedicated to the best street workers and street worker teams. Again, in Estonia, we have some similarities - every year the Education and Youth Board chooses the best youth worker.

We would also like to highlight a discussion series called “ČAS OD ČASU”. Through a series of meetings, well-known people try to change misunderstandings about people at risk of social exclusion, low-threshold social work and street work. Regular guests are prominent personalities who, through their work, eliminate prejudices and change the mental settings of the majority society.³

We had various questions about the system and found some things challenging to understand. At the same time, we found some similarities. In the end, we had a good overview of how everything works. Prevention is mostly organised by NGOs who work according to the Social Services Act. The building of relationships starts from the “bottom-up”: connecting with schools and having discussions about street work services and preventive programs (these programs have been introduced in some schools during breaks – contact, monitoring, and working individually).



³ <https://casodcasu.cz/>



BEZTÍŽE

Beztíže is an organisation that joins together diverse approaches to bring social services to young people aged 6–26. Beztíže operates in Prague 2, Prague 3 and Prague 10. They work on the streets and in clubs (Beztíže and Beztíže²), providing services to all youngsters in difficult life situations, with unstable family backgrounds who might be against the social environment or social norms. The organisation runs two low-threshold clubs and three field programs for at-risk youngsters. The clubs are easily accessible places for all social groups of children and young people. Its services are provided free of charge and anonymously. The clubs offer an inviting place for their clients, a safe environment, various equipment and programs. In addition to entertainment and development activities, they also provide counseling, social services and an emphasis on the prevention of risky behaviors (skipping school, drug experimentation, high-risk sexual behavior, etc.). Youngsters from the surrounding area meet regularly in the clubs with their friends, they learn new skills and converse with the staff. Common themes for youngsters in Beztíže are a lack of motivation for school, aggression, fights and violence. The topic of drugs is not as paramount as it used to be, but it is still relevant. Beztíže organises regular and one-off workshops in their low-threshold clubs and directly on the streets, the best known are the rap workshops - many creators and groups have formed through these. Youngsters can find alternative perspectives and meet new and inspiring people. In addition to the clubs and workshops, there are other approaches. Beztíže has been organising preventive field trips outside Prague since 2009. During the trips they use methods of

experiential pedagogy and the concept of The Hero's Journey, which was brought to the Czech Republic by the American psychologist Bret Stephenson. On the field trips youngsters can try, for example, art techniques, sports activities, group games, cooperative activities, group reflections, cooking together, cottage care, and more.⁴

Something else that we noticed were the sexual education-themed posters in the toilets. We could use this practice in the youth centres in Estonia, as it could be beneficial to our youngsters as well.

The staff in club Beztíže consists of three people, and it is the same in Beztíže². Street workers cover three areas: Prague 2, Prague 10, and Žižkov, and they work in pairs. In our organisation we also work mainly like this, but we switch people and change our working areas while here it is the same area with the same people. It is an efficient method to gain youngsters' trust, but not necessary for us because our city is more compact. How the pair dynamic differs from ours is hard to say in such a brief time, but we felt that cooperation between workers was good. Beztíže works on the streets two or three times a week.

After the presentation, we split into three groups. One of our team went to Klub Cesta in Říčany, two of us went to do street work in the regions of Prague 2 and Prague 10, and one of us went to do street work in Žižkov.

KLUB CESTA

Říčany is a small town in the Prague-East District in the Central Bohemian Region of the Czech Republic. It has about 16,000 inhabitants. We learned that it is also one of the most expensive areas to live around Prague, as in recent years real estate prices have risen by a remarkable amount. Klub Cesta provides social help for people in need - youngsters, families and the elderly, but the focus in the club is on youngsters aged 7 to 26. During COVID they lost contact with many 16–17-year-old youngsters and now they are trying to reconnect with them.

The club is part of Cesta integrace, a non-profit organisation. The general goal is to contribute to the growth of new and non-traditional approaches in social work, thereby helping vulnerable groups. The organisation has different methods of working with its clients. There is a club for youngsters, a mediation service, and legal advice for people in financial difficulties – debt, credit cards, court cases, etc. In cooperation with the police, the organisation started a project teaching children how to properly ride bikes and get a licence. The organisation is involved in the project "Together and professionally - support for cooperation and quality of low-threshold

⁴ https://beztize.cz/co-delame__trashed/preventivni-vyjezdove-akce/

social services". It also has a food aid program comparable with the Toidupank program in Estonia, but we run it through the local government. Through Cesta integrace it goes directly to the people in need. They collect food from supermarkets and later distribute it to families in need. Additionally, Cesta cooperates with a local shop "KOLOBEH" where donated goods are sold. The money gained by selling the donated goods is used to support people in need via the social services of Cesta. Several community events take place each year to provide services for everyone – these are called family days.⁵

During our visit there were four workers there and some youngsters. In the club can be found opportunities to spend free time but also to get assistance with studying. There is a kitchen, a bar and other possibilities for leisure time - for example there is a small gym for the youngsters to use. We felt that there was a genuine bond between the youngsters and the staff.

⁵ <https://www.cestaintegrace.cz/>



Back in the city, street work in Prague 10 was akin to our street work. Starting from the Eden Shopping Centre, we continued through small streets until we came to an old skatepark filled with graffiti - the kind of place where we would expect to meet youngsters, but we did not meet anyone that day. It is a known meeting place, and Beztíže has previously organised a skating workshop there, for example.



We met two teenage girls on a playground, but as there were four of us, we Estonians stayed behind because we all thought it might be a bit overwhelming for the girls to have four grownups approaching. Our Czech hosts had a short conversation and later said the girls were

not talkative. We also went to see The Church of Saint Wenceslas, in front of which was a billboard providing information on Beztiže as well as photos of various activities organised by the club and folders about drugs, sexually transmitted diseases, and important contacts. As we understood, the church and the organisation also have a form of cooperation.



Afterwards, we met with another pair of street workers. In conclusion, it appears that the street workers in Prague face more severe issues than we do in Estonia. These are, naturally, related to themes like drugs, alcohol, problems at home or school. The limited encounters with youngsters and the conversations with the street workers gave us the impression that there are more financial problems with families, and marijuana is much more present or seen on the streets. We do not have a determined Romani community in Estonia. As Romani face discrimination and exclusion, it raises different concerns.

NEPOSEDA

On the next day, we went to visit Neposedá. This is a community social service that has been operating for 22 years, during which they have helped over 3000 individuals and families who have found themselves in unexpected situations. They say that anyone can come and find help, regardless of the nature of the problem they are facing. They also organise community events to improve life on the outskirts of Prague. In 2018, the organisation offered financial assistance of up to CZK 20,000 which socially disadvantaged families could apply for to educate their children. This financial assistance has helped children finish school and increased their chances

of finding future employment. The funds have helped tutor children with special needs and purchase the study aids needed for admission to an apprenticeship or high school.⁶

Neposedá incorporates three projects - Autobus (youth club and street work), HOPO (youth club and street work), and a housing program. We started our day in HOPO, a youth club in Horní Počernice, also known as Prague 20 - a municipal district in the eastern part of Prague. It is a low-threshold club, and they also do street work. The target age group in the club is 9-18 and on the streets it is 9-26, with most of the clients being between 11–26-years-old. The club has a social worker and a methodologist, one addiction worker, and four people with a social work background. It offers various activities - sports events and camps, therapy, education, tutoring, etc. Opening hours are from Monday to Friday from 13:00 to 18:00. The club also collaborates with the housing program mentioned before.

The Housing Program was established at the beginning of 2020 as part of the Křižovatka Field Program, which operates in the eastern part of Prague. The program supports people in need of housing or those at risk of losing their homes. Clients are both individuals and families. They receive support in various phases, according to their current needs. It can be assistance with applying for a city or municipal apartment or the conclusion of a lease agreement, to comprehensive support once in housing to maintain it permanently. During 2020 the program supported 12 individuals and 16 families. There are eight people working on the program, who are mainly social workers. It can be challenging to find suitable accommodation for their clients as there is an affordability crisis in the Czech Republic - housing prices keep rising and, more than others, this affects young people and those with lower incomes. House prices have become dislocated from incomes. The program also provides material help (food, furniture, clothes) and assistance. Additionally, they organise events for homeless people - barbecues, Christmas events, and food collection.

From HOPO, two of us went to Autobus, which is the other club working under Neposedá. It is in Dolní Počernice - a municipal district in the eastern part of Prague. They are a low-threshold club that also does street work. They are also planning to do street work at schools. The target group is 9–18-year-olds, with individual work done with older youngsters, but street work with 11–26-year-olds. Four people work in the club: a social worker, an addiction worker, and two with social work backgrounds. The club runs from Monday to Thursday from 13:00

⁶ <https://neposeda.org/>

to 18:00. It offers activities for youth activation, therapy, education, tutoring, and prevention. Working with the community is an integral part of their work.



houses. At the same time, one of the team members tutored two youngsters - it was impressive how they managed the workflow.

The other part of our team went to do street work and visit Beztize² in Prague 2, near the Nusle bridge. They had prepared some notes about Estonia and hung them on a wall so that the youngsters could learn about their guests, which was lovely. The club is small and cosy, with a private corner for individual work, a kitchen, and an open space. The staff have their own



space. Youngsters can use the computer and play board games, a tutor comes to the club regularly so the youngsters can receive help with studying. It is good to see a person specifically appointed for that job. There are two workers present whilst the club is open (the club team consists of three people) and once or twice a week the tutor is there to help children with schooling. We understood that people working on the street and in the club do not get together very often, although they all work under the same NGO. Our experience in Estonia is contrasting - we put much effort into networking. The club and the street workers work a lot with Romani youngsters. As mentioned before, the Romani face ongoing prejudice and negative perceptions in the Czech Republic, so it is crucial to work on involvement and integration. The club and street workers are an essential part of that dialogue.



Our day ended with a social gathering in Bistro Střecha - a bar that is also an example of social entrepreneurship - people with experience of homelessness or those recently released from prison work at the bar. It was a lovely place with tasty food and a great atmosphere, and we had a delightful time. In addition to decent employment, the workers get advice on housing, debt relief, etc. After dinner we went to see the city and had some pleasant talks with each other.



KLUB BĚCHO

The following day began with us having some free time in the morning, after which we travelled to the third club under Neposeda - Klub Běcho. This is the newest club, which opened at the beginning of September 2021. It is also a low-threshold club for children and youth. Located in Běchovice, a suburb of Prague, it is about 13 km east of the city centre, Klub Běcho is for children and young people to spend time with their peers and realise what they enjoy. The club organises leisure and educational activities for children and youngsters,

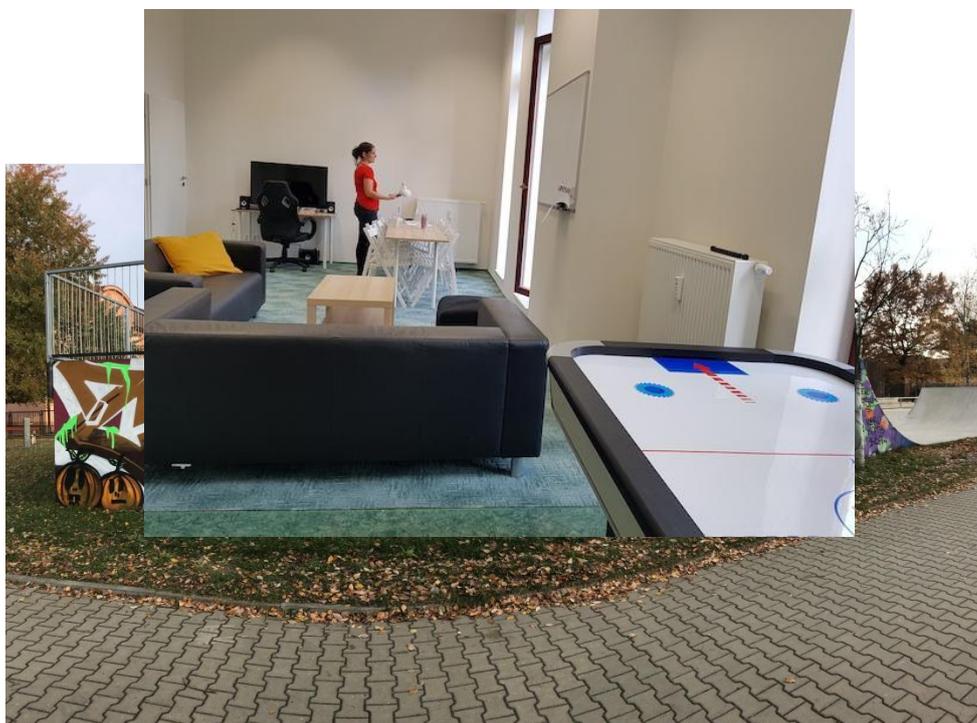
keywords are meaningful and safe leisure time and providing a space to find new friends. Six people work in this club, and they also do street work in the area. We had the opportunity to join the team in street work and spend time in the club. So, splitting into two groups, two of us went to the streets, and two stayed in the club. The street work was an unusual experience because we went to a forest. We walked on a nature trail, saw a couple of horses, and headed to Klánovický les, which spans over 1000 ha. We walked through the forest without meeting anyone, but youngsters are known to spend time there. Eventually, we arrived at a school where we sat down and waited for youngsters to join us. It is an effective method, spending some time

in one place, sitting, waiting for youngsters. We also use that practice sometimes in our street work. There was also a legal graffiti wall, something we have been trying to initiate in Tallinn.

We did not talk to any youngsters on our walk, but we discussed our working methods and found parallels in how we connect and what problems we face. It is honestly universal - drugs and alcohol, issues at school and home, and nothing to do with their time.

The club itself looks very cosy and new. Youngsters can play board games or air hockey, there is a small kitchenette and a separate room for tutoring or office work. They also have a hall for dance practice or other activities that require more space.

(photos from <https://neposeda.org/program/klub-becho/>)



We spent some time with the kids, doing handicrafts, playing air hockey, and talking about their interests and life in general. Our experience in Prague has shown that youngsters aged 7-15 do not speak English very well. We interacted mainly through Google Translate. The staff also helped, and so did our knowledge of Russian. So we were able to communicate, and it was good to practice and a challenge as well. Club Běcho is open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 13:00 to 18:00. When the closing time came, it was also time for us to head back to the hotel and enjoy our evening.



FOTBAL PRO ROZVOJ

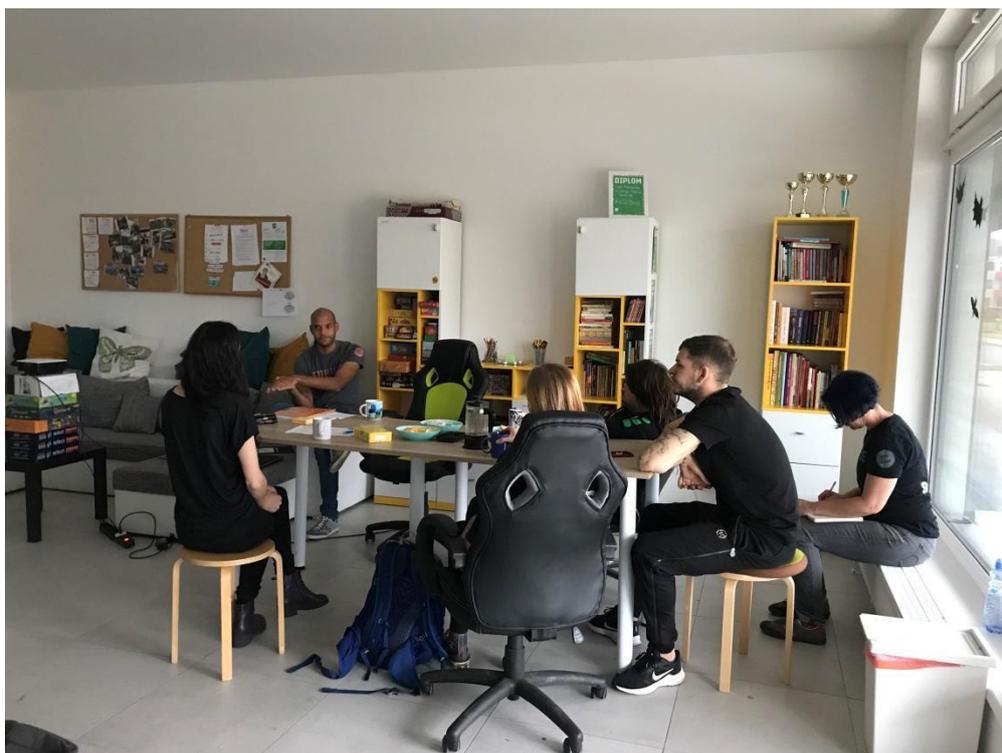
On the last day, we gathered in Autobus to learn about Football3. This is a project inspired by the death of the Colombian footballer Andrés Escobar. He scored an own goal in the 1994 FIFA World Cup that led to the elimination of his team, eleven days later he was murdered. After that, Jürgen Griesback decided that it was time for football to be not only about winning but that it could also be a tool to unite people on the pitch. The methodology which emerged from this need for dialogue and understanding is called Football3, and it is now in use around the globe. Organisations that wish to use football for social change have adopted the approach. It is not about the skills of the game; it is about the skills of life and fair play. We saw a presentation on how the method works by the local organisation Fotbal pro rozvoj (Football for development).

The tournaments are played in three half-times:

- 1 a pre-tournament team debate when the rules of the game are agreed

- 2 the game itself
- 3 a post-game reflection - where the teams meet off the pitch to discuss how the game went and how well the values of fair play and respect were put into action.

But besides the game, we also learned that they work with more than 20 non-governmental organisations from all over the Czech Republic, using their concept in their daily work with youngsters. They organise Fair play football leagues in different regions, have workshops, training, presentations and other events. During June and July, the organisation travels around the Czech Republic with Czech and international volunteers from the network Streetfootballworld. They also participate in international projects and initiatives. In Estonia, we also use football as a tool for development for youngsters. SPIN is a unique sport-based, scientifically proven youth development program. Sessions are held three times a week and consist of a football game and social workshops. It is still quite different from Football3. Both have their perks. After the presentation, two of us participated in a match. We tried to incorporate our brand-new knowledge into the game, and it was a new experience. We felt that the discussion was a bit long, and it might diminish the interest to play. But overall it is a great tool to teach youngsters respect and other values.





KLUB CESTA STREET WORK IN KUNICE SECONDARY SCHOOL OF CRAFTS

On the same day, one of us also returned to Říčany to see Klub Cesta working with a local school. Kunice Secondary School of Crafts is a secondary school that provides education with an apprenticeship certificate to pupils from practical primary schools, special primary schools or primary schools where the pedagogical-psychological counselling centre or special pedagogical centre diagnoses a reason for education in a special secondary school. It is possible to learn five vocations: pastry chef, florist, cook, salesperson, or caregiver. There are 53 students in the school. The ages of the students vary, but they all are special needs youngsters. The school is in a scenic location, in the middle of a forest. As we arrived, the youngsters came to greet us. Klub Cesta workers visit this school once a week and they know the youngsters well. We brought board games with us. The main thing is communicating, of course. The youngsters spend an entire week at the school, leaving only at weekends, so talking to someone from outside is like a breath of fresh air for them. The location somewhat limits the youngster's life – they cannot spend an evening with their friends at a café or a park. Klub Cesta does necessary work with the youngsters, giving them an alternative to their everyday routine.

As we arrived, the school was celebrating Halloween. The youngsters were all in costumes that were creative and amusing and we were happy to let them paint our faces as well. They were

also trying to speak in English, but mostly the questions got translated back and forth so that we had the chance to communicate. We talked for a while about drugs and life in school. Later, an unplanned dance party occurred, which started with a few youngsters impersonating their favourite entertainers and escalated into a big party in a hall. The food served was made by the youngsters. Then we all chose the best costumes. The head of the school also partook, and we had a chance to talk for a short time. We also had a tour of the school.



To modernise and improve education, the Kunice Secondary School of Crafts continuously submits applications for financial support from various extra-budgetary sources, including European funds.⁷ The people working there seemed enthusiastic, and it felt like they were working with their hearts. The youngsters seemed to be enjoying their time at the Halloween party a lot, all of them were cheerful and talkative, even if it was a bit chaotic. Klub Cesta workers appear to have a good relationship with the school and the youngsters, it seemed to be a solid cooperation. The conversations we had showed a need for additional members of the workforce, Klub Cesta has many assignments and staff burnout could be an issue.

In conclusion, we had an informative and inspirational week gathering lots of knowledge. We felt welcomed, and every question we had got answered. There was so much information that, at times, it was overwhelming, but this intensive learning gave us some new ideas. There are a few significant differences between Estonian and Czech street working methods. They generally do not approach youngsters they already have contact with when in a group⁸ or with parents, but we do. They believe that youngsters might not want their peers or parents to know about their association with the organisations. We always presume it is okay. We also hug and shake hands with youngsters, but they do not. Also, we do not call youngsters clients. There are also some differences in the issues we face on the streets. We loved the dynamic in the teams - it was warm, considerate and light, with some good laughs. The experience was an inspiring opportunity to share good practises, and we are very grateful.

⁷ <https://www.ssrkunice.cz/>

⁸ NOTE FROM NEPOSEDA: In Neposedá we don't approach youngsters who are alone or in a pair, but those that are in a group we do approach.