



Garden as multispecies settlement

The lecturers, educators and artists imagine a newly established garden with a flowering meadow and plan two children's camps - one for the Ukrainian community that settled in Ostrava after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the other for Czech children aged 7-14. Together they link the content of the camps not only to the themes offered by the garden and its permaculture mission, but also to an ongoing exhibition about the coexistence of human and more-than-human urban animals titled Escaped, Found a Hideout, Still on the Run (Animal News). The goals of Shaping Patterns project - sustainability and strengthening children's motivation and engagement - are overarching themes.



Meeting and observing the garden

We enter a garden. It is flat with high herbs. We smell them and feel their flowers, leaves, stems, shapes and colours. From a distance we cannot see the animals, but when we come closer we can hear their buzzing and flapping wings. They have flown into the city centre from the surrounding area. The city is as much their home as it is ours. We can hear them and the city. We slowly begin to imagine our own stories and reports from our observations of different parts of the garden.



Stories for us and others

We are in a different site – the former Bauhaus. We are speaking Ukrainian, moving, dancing and speaking loudly our thoughts. Memories and desires are shaped into images and those are insert into handmade papier-mâché frames. Feels like cooking. Frames need to dry, the process is long, but children are staying involved. Day after we are in garden doing a guerilla gardening with two Ukrainian curators, artists and educators. Theory and practice!

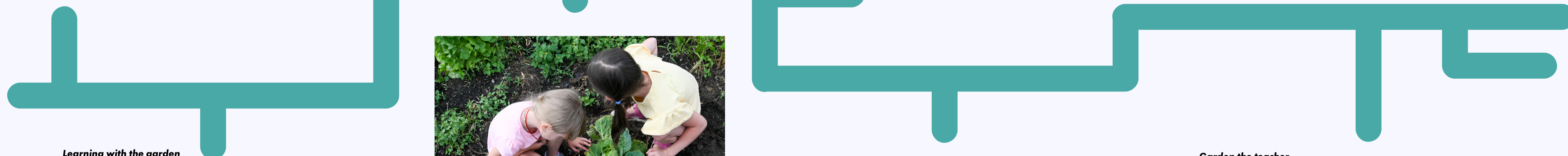
STORIES OF INVOLVEMENT – EXAMPLES FROM PRACTICE

INTO THE EARTH

Location: Garden of Present, PLATO City Gallery of Contemporary Art, PLATO Bauhaus

Time: July 10–14th and 24–28th, 2023

People involved:
15 Ukrainian children and 15 Czech children age 7 till 14 and 9 Czech and Ukrainian lecturers, pedagogues, artists and gallery educators (Viktoriiia Tymonova, Jiří Gruber, Edith Jeřábková, Denisa Tomášková, Alice Sovadinová, Tomáš Kozohorský, Yevgenia Larinova, KsiProstir)



Learning with the garden

The newly born garden becomes not only the environment, safe space but also the main actor of the camp. We (all participants of the camp) observe the processes that take place in it. We rest in the few shades in the garden and listen to its sounds, bustles and stirrings, which we try to capture by our own creation. By observing and listening we learn how to be non-invasive and caring co-inhabitants. We learn how to use but not deplete, how to become responsible co-citizens and sustainable as ecosystems themselves. The garden is plants, animals, fungi, other organisms and soil. We dig our hands into the soil to give birth to something new – beautiful and important to the well-being of different organisms.



The garden whispers stories

We form two working groups based on who is interested in what. Some children want to write scripts, some want to learn the technology of making a film, others want to stand up and act and some direct. We observe again for a long time the garden and then create the structure and story of the report. We look for the interconnected lives in the garden. Who lives where, who thrives, what tastes good, who protects who, who likes what. We get to know the garden but also ourselves. Then we shoot a movie. The postproduction is a joined process, learning and decision making. Children have their voices and agency. The video technology is consciously selected since the gallery has the equipment and there is no other material needed.



Interdependence and co-adaptation

Our observations shape the stories of the creatures, our fellow citizens living on different floors of the garden. We don't want to keep them to ourselves, we record them on camera, we knead them out of soil, recycled papier-mâché, we paint and draw them. Throughout the process artists navigate children in workshops and tutors and educators offer the experience and advice. We get to know teamwork, one has to rely on the other. It is the same in the garden, the bee relies on the flower to bloom and the flower relies on the bee to pollinate it. We want to show this knowledge of the interconnectedness of different organisms to those who are not here in the garden with us. We display our outputs in the gallery in an exhibition that shaped the initial thinking about our summer creative activities.

Garden the teacher

When children connect to the processes that take place in the garden, they can easily shape them and move them forward. Crucial role of the educator, artist, lecturer is to open the children's mind to the garden life. Their stories unfold surprisingly quickly and can lead to unexpected content. They don't need further stimulation, sometimes only assurance that what they do is possible. There is also instant need to share the stories with those, who are outside of this circle, so their learning becomes collective knowledge. Two films were exhibited at the main exhibition of the gallery. Processes taking place in the garden mediate principals of ethical living. Children learned from children and lecturers. Adults learned from children. We all learn from garden.

