

Nový Hlavák

New Main Station District

Competitive Dialogue Procurement Procedure

Tender documentation

P06.2 Anthropological research on user needs and habits in the Vrchlického sady Park and the surroundings of the Main Railway Station in Prague

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&
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1. Introduction

The present document follows up on previous documents focusing on the Vrchlického sady Park, which we prepared for the Municipal District of Prague 1. Specifically, it builds on the “Research on interventions in public spaces burdened in a similar way as the Vrchlického sady Park and the Main Railway Station area”, which we carried out in the autumn of 2019, and especially the winter part of the field research carried out in December 2019 and January 2020, with the outputs set forth in the document “User habits and needs in the Vrchlického sady Park and the surroundings of the Main Railway Station in Prague”. In addition to mediating the actors’ positions as regards the defined space and understanding their needs, the present document is also intended to serve as one of the underlying documents for the Prague Institute of Planning and Development as part of the planned architectural dialogue.

In the introduction to “User habits and needs in the Vrchlického sady Park and the surroundings of the Main Railway Station in Prague”, we justified the importance of anthropological field research for the development of the contemporary public space. In this text, we will focus on the space itself.

1.1. Characteristics of the space

The park is “the only park far and wide”, it is “in the city centre but rather detached”. The Riegrový sady Park is far away from there and is not easily accessible (railway station and main road).

(from field notes, interview with a male resident and dog owner, age 60, 6 January 2020)

You only go outside to smoke.

(from an interview based on questionnaires, respondent smoking outside and waiting for a train, age 25, 27 July 2020)

Yeah, it’s a space with huge potential. There’s a part with tall trees where there’s shade in the summer, but you’re not allowed there, or at least you weren’t. It keeps changing whether you can or cannot go there, and people are using that area as a toilet, so you don’t really want to be there anyway. And the state of the pavements... and the benches... It’s not pretty, right. All it would take would be new asphalt, some plain benches, no mosaics and that sort of...

(from an interview with a social worker, 6 January 2020)

It’s an incredibly ugly railway station, it’s lost its spirit. One of the ugliest parks in the history of mankind.

(from an interview based on questionnaires, man was in the park with his daughter, age under 30, 14 July 2020)

We tried to describe the area of the Vrchlického sady Park in our previous report. After the second phase of the field research, where we reviewed the findings from the winter part, we feel the need to return to the park's description and complete it. After the completion of the entire research we have gained a deeper understanding of the functioning of the Vrchlického sady Park. Thanks to long-term research, we have been able to compare how the park changes depending on the different seasons and weather. We also partially captured how the park was affected by the coronavirus crisis.

A huge number of different people with different motivations for being in the park meet there every day. In fact, we cannot imagine a more complex public space in contemporary Prague. As we went deeper into the nature of the Vrchlického sady Park in our research, the outlines became less clear and it was more and more difficult to define the space. What at first seemed clear and given suddenly appeared up close as constantly changing, intricate, made up of networks of various relationships. We would like to stress the danger of disrupting the functioning ecosystem of the Vrchlického sady Park by unwanted interventions that could try to limit the diversity of the park and might stop working for some stakeholder groups.

Above all, we want to emphasise the fragility of the Vrchlického sady Park. This is related to its complexity and the fact that different groups of people have become accustomed to coexisting and functioning side by side there. Unless future interventions in the park are as sensitive as possible, they might fail. It is an incredibly complicated space, but at the same time very open and accessible.

We perceive it as open precisely because of the possibility of coexistence of different actor groups (although perhaps problematic) and their activities and narratives. We see openness as a positive phenomenon. It is a phenomenon where the space is accessible to all kinds of people and there is room for social and cultural diversity there. At the same time, it is a space that, by its geographical location and urban design and by being the target of different groups of people, points to the mutual conflicts between those groups.

We do not see openness and closeness as absolute and unchanging processes. In the Vrchlického sady Park, as an open space from our point of view, closed spaces emerge to a certain extent, in the form of places that invite only a certain group of people to stay, or in the form of time when the park and its functions again welcome only a certain group of people. We will try to describe this trend in the chapter devoted to the park space, among others. We will write about places that are closed to some people and only work for a certain group as problematic places.

The form of the Vrchlického sady Park carries a symbolic value, as it is a park surrounding an important traffic junction in the centre of the capital city. Our communication partners perceive the representativeness of the place (*"the gateway to the centre of Prague"*², *"When a foreigner comes out of the station, the view is not exactly spectacular"*³, *"When it comes to foreigners, the park is a disgrace"*⁴). The symbolic value of the space makes its revitalisation a political issue.

The Vrchlického sady Park is a famous and at the same time stigmatised space. Most people know it

² From an interview with an establishment operator.

³ From an interview with a passer-by, 15 July 2020

⁴ From an interview with a passer-by, 15 July 2020

as “Sherwood”, a problematic area with an increased incidence of crime. This partially justified idea is further reproduced among people. *The Vrchlického sady Park as Sherwood* thus becomes almost a folklore topic that is conveyed through intimidating stories. This narrative overshadows other important topics and people involved. In this text, we are thus trying to describe the functioning of the Vrchlického sady Park in as much complexity as possible.

Over the period of our research, we have also developed a media screening of articles related to the park, where we have tried to find out what the media image of the park is and whether it further replicates the shared ideas about “Sherwood”.

Regarding the changes in the Vrchlického sady Park according to the seasons, it is not surprising that the most significant difference between winter and summer is in the number of people who spend their leisure time in the park (e.g., sitting on benches or on the lawn). In case of bad weather (cold, rain) the people retreat to the station hall or its close proximity. In hot weather, it is especially important that there are shady spots and also where they are located.

Passers-by are present in the park regardless of the weather or time of year, as transit routes run through there. The only thing that differs by season is how these people are dressed or how fast they walk. Some excerpts from field notes depicting the situation in the park during rainy and hot sunny weather:

The “observation tower” offers a good view of the area in front of the station hall and the park. Because it was raining, the benches were empty with one exception (a homeless person). There was no one visible in the area in front of the hall, only occasional passers-by. A significant flow of people passing by could be observed from the direction of the Hlavní nádraží (Main Railway Station) tram stop (...) You could see a lot more people from the lower perspective than from the tower. They were hiding from the rain in front of the entrance doors to the station hall.

(from field notes, 2 August 2020, evening)

It’s hot today, there are many people in the grassy areas. We can see again how important shade is here now, cast especially by the trees. Not only locals, but also others sit there; we mostly guess (and ascertain from several attempts at conversation) that these are mainly passengers waiting to change trains or who have got off their trains.

(from field notes, 27 July 2020, afternoon)

We did not go into the field during the coronavirus crisis, but we partially captured how the Vrchlického sady Park area was affected in that period in the responses of our communication partners. The main change was the decline in the number of people passing through and waiting. This brought to the fore the presence of socio-economically vulnerable people (*locals*). One of the locals commented on the situation after the end of the state of emergency as follows: “*We have neither corona nor crowns, so we are sitting here*”⁵. A social worker we interviewed in depth

⁵ 2 July 2020

described the space during the crisis as follows:

“We used to go there even at that time, during the coronavirus pandemic I mean; actually, only socially disadvantaged people were there.(...) So actually, at that time it was easy to work there, to tell you the truth, because there were no distractions. It wasn’t that complicated... or rather, it was clear that the people were either our clients or clients of other organisations. That time was thus the best for us, really.”

(a social service worker operating in the Vrchlického sady Park, interviewed on 21 July 2020)

At this point, we would like to clarify the information from the previous report regarding the depiction of the Vrchlického sady Park in maps in the Prague metro. It is correctly depicted in green as a park and not as a white space. The white colour is used for the railway tracks. We thought that the idea of the Vrchlického sady Park as a *thoroughfare*, shared by a large part of our communication partners, had penetrated into the cartographic representation as well.

2. Research methodology

- participant observation
- informal conversations with residents directly in the park and the connecting corridors
- go-along talks
- semi-structured interviews
- in-depth interviews with establishment operators in the park and in the surrounding area
- visual data
 - photo documentation focusing on the public space and activities of users of the Vrchlického sady Park and the adjacent surroundings
 - maps representing the relations of local actors to the defined area
- research of historical sources
- media screening

The combination of the aforesaid qualitative methods was chosen to capture the context that serves to understand the social relations, ties and activities in the Vrchlického sady Park.

The research was carried out in two research periods in order to cover seasonal changes in the functioning of the Vrchlického sady Park. The research team spent approximately 190 man-hours in the park area during the period from 1 December 2019 to 15 January 2020. In the second research phase, from 1 May 2020 to 31 July 2020, approximately 190 additional man-hours were spent on the research.

The field data were then subjected to qualitative analysis, the results of which are presented in this document.

3. History of the Vrchlického sady Park⁶

When trying to understand the current usage of the Vrchlického sady Park, we cannot forget its historical development, which explains how and why the park and the surroundings of the Main Railway Station acquired the form we encounter at present.

Until 1829 the municipality of Prague did not own any parks. The destinations of walks and leisure time were the Prague islands, for example. As we take a historical excursion to the places where the present Vrchlického sady Park is located, let us first mention the New City Park (Nový Městský Park), with an area of 26 morgens (note: old unit of measurement of land), which was expanded by a part of the land near the then Emperor Franz Joseph I Railway Station in 1885. In that area, the so-called Velký sad Park (Large Park) was built by František Malý and František Thomayer, conceived as a romantic landscape based on rocky slopes and water bodies.

A major milestone in the spatial and functional transformation of the surroundings of the present Vrchlického sady Park was the construction of one of the most significant Prague Art Nouveau buildings, the massive building of the Main Railway Station, in the years 1901-1914. A spacious central hall, to which two lower wings with raised side pavilions were attached, became the heart of the building. **The park was partially revitalised according to the design of architect Karel Skalák and, in 1913, it was renamed the Vrchlického sady Park following the death of Jaroslav Vrchlický.** In 1916, a monument to the natural scientist Jan Svatopluk Presl, made by the sculptor Bohumil Kafka and the architect Josef Gočár, was placed in the park.

The surface tramway was also an important intervention in the area under examination. Its construction started on 7 January 1965 in the section of the present metro line C: Nuselský most (Nusle Bridge) – Legerova (Legerova Street) – Hlavní nádraží (Main Railway Station) – Bolzanova (Bolzanova Street). The subsequently built system of metro lines significantly changed the face of Prague and especially the ways of transport around the city. Along with the construction of the metro line system, the bus station at nearby Florenc was being rebuilt, and at the same time, between 1972 and 1977, a modern departure and arrival hall, the first in Prague to offer a direct transfer to the metro, was being built at the Main Railway Station. **The Main Railway Station hall changed the shape of the park and took up a significant part of the former park area together with the north-south main road, parking lot, access roads and the aforementioned metro lines.**

As far as art objects, sculptures and cultural monuments in the Vrchlického sady Park are concerned, apart from the aforementioned Presl Monument, there is a replica of the sculpture “Fellowship (Sbratření)” by sculptor Karel Pokorný, built in 1947. In 1960, the sculpture was placed in front of the Fanta Building of the Main Railway Station and after further interventions connected with the construction of the metro line, it found a place on the border of the Vrchlického sady Park and Bolzanova Street, where it remains to this day.

Another monument, with a statue of the American President Woodrow Wilson, is to symbolise the allied relations between Czechoslovakia and the United States of America during the First World War

⁶ Bělina, P. et al. (1998). Dějiny Prahy II (History of Prague II). Prague: Paseka.

(1914-1918); the original monument dates back to July 1928. After the declaration of the Second World War, the monument with the statue was removed under the orders of the German occupation administration. Similarly to other art objects in the current Vrchlického sady Park, the statue was moved around. The beginnings of the current form of the statue and monument began to take shape in 2008, and in October 2011 it was unveiled.

A unique example of Czech cubist architecture is the cubist kiosk from 1922, which has been protected since 1981. It is located on the edge of the Vrchlického sady Park and Bolzanova Street. Currently, it offers currency exchange and ATM services; originally it served as a newsagent's and tobacco shop.

We would like to mention that even today, the monuments are not mere "dead" memorials. We have repeatedly encountered flowers or other memorabilia placed on the "Fellowship" and W. Wilson monuments.

4. Actor groups, their characteristics and interactions between them

In this section, we refer to the table of actor groups and their possible benefits for the participation process, published on page 6 of "User habits and needs in the Vrchlického sady Park and the surroundings of the Main Railway Station in Prague". In the follow-up research we focused on a deeper understanding of the motivations, needs and interactions between the different actor groups.

As already mentioned in "User habits and needs in the Vrchlického sady Park and the surroundings of the Main Railway Station in Prague", it is important to keep in mind that our division of people into actor groups is designed as an analytical tool for better understanding of their positions and their relationship to the space under examination. The boundaries between the individual actor groups are unclear and fluid.

4.1. Passers-by

"When we approached people passing in both directions, they initially dismissed us saying they were in a hurry. I think it's most effective to say right away that we are doing research on the park revitalisation. A large number of people are interested in that and eager to express their opinion."

(from field notes, 15 July 2020, morning)

"'Sherwood', the heart of Prague"

"A thoroughfare."

“My route to and from work, nothing else.”

“An opportunity for improvement.”

“A park you just want to get away from.”

“A large relaxation zone”

(how passers-by described the Vrchlického sady Park)

Characteristics

The Vrchlického sady Park is specific for its high fluctuation of people. It surrounds a major transport hub in the centre of Prague – the Main Railway Station and the associated metro and tram stations. In terms of the number of people, the *passers-by* are the largest actor group in the park that we defined.

The main characteristic feature of this group is that they are just passing through. Or, in other words, these are people for whom the Vrchlického sady Park is not a destination. **Whether the people walk through the park to the railway station or tram stop, to do their shopping or to work, they usually have no reason to stay in the park for very long.** It is possible to observe “rush hours” in the park, i.e. a noticeably higher level of movement of people passing through, generally at the beginning and end of the working day (7-9 AM and 4-6 PM).

We often talked to people who regularly walk through the Vrchlického sady Park to and from work. **However, some of the people passing through do not know Prague and it is their first time in the park. Because of the lack of signage, the park space can be confusing.** We also often observed people with suitcases and phones with map applications in their hands walking through unmarked, barriered and unpleasant places (especially from the parking lot of the station building to the tip of the park and then towards Wenceslas Square – see the map of barriers in “User habits and needs in the Vrchlického sady Park and the surroundings of the Main Railway Station in Prague”, page 13).

Interactions between the individual groups

The area of the Vrchlického sady Park was often evaluated negatively by passers-by. One of the most common reasons was the conflicting nature of the relationship between passers-by and the *locals* (see the actor group defined below). Often, passers-by would speak negatively about the *locals*, labelling them as “homeless” or “junkies” or referring to them in innuendo:

“It isn’t nice to see this.” (woman, about 50 years old)

“It’s not a pretty sight.” (woman, about 60 years old)

“There are all sorts of weirdos hanging around.” (man, about 40 years old)

“There is a large percentage of non-standard people here.” (man, about 40 years old)

“Drugs, alcohol, dope, people different from us.” (woman, about 40 years old, with a child)

The perception of the space by passers-by as potentially dangerous was important, but without direct experience of our communication partners with threatening behaviour. Rather, they verbalised their discomfort in passing among the *locals* or repeated stories they had heard somewhere else. In this context, it is also important to mention the relationship of those passing through to the security forces. Police officers are often seen as the key to solving the problems of the Vrchlického sady Park (see further in the section on security forces).

The passers-by also negatively evaluated begging. It could be said that any confrontation between passers-by and the *locals* was perceived as negative and unpleasant. Certainly not everyone passing by evaluated the presence of the *locals* in the park negatively, but it was one of the most frequent topics that resonated very strongly.

Needs and visions

It should be borne in mind that the answers of those passing by vary according to the places where we interviewed them. For example, a person in a hurry to catch a train usually does not have much time to look around the park, they just take the fastest way to the station hall. We often encountered that, after our question about the positive and negative aspects of the Vrchlického sady Park and its future transformation, the communication partners started to reflect on the space, look around and look for specific things that needed to be changed. This was especially true for the negative aspects. In this respect, one only has to look around the park and one will come across a neglected, meaningless or damaged element.



The perception of disorderliness was also closely related to the negative evaluation of the space. A specific problem often mentioned was the lack of toilets, as a result of which trees, bushes and various corners are used for urination and subsequently the smell of urine spreads through the park. It is certainly not true that only the *locals* are responsible for this pollution. Due to the nature of the Vrchlického sady Park as a place where a huge number of people move daily, we noticed many other people urinating in the area, too.

We had toilets there [at the Wander Bar], and it's a fact that quite a few tourists who were passing by (...) asked us at the bar if they could go to the toilet. There were many such people, who saw

that we had mobile toilets, so they immediately tried whether they were open. (...) We had this experience, that the people who were walking around, they were trying for the toilets (...), a lot of them.

(from an interview with the Wander Bar operator, 9 January 2020)

The perception of the area as polluted prevents the use of the Vrchlického sady Park for relaxation or other leisure activities.

The positive evaluation of the area was related to greenery. At the moment when the passers-by were asked to think about any positive aspects of the park, they mostly shifted their perception from the Vrchlického sady Park as a *thoroughfare* to the Vrchlického sady Park as an actual *park*. However, while they spoke of the greenery as a positive asset of the park, they noted its state of neglect.

When asked about the possible transformation of the park, it was evident that the communication partners often perceived the Vrchlického sady Park as a place with great untapped potential. The potential was perceived mainly in the sense of a green park in the city centre, which, however, deserves more care and investment.

The main topics that were discussed with passers-by were:

- the need to maintain greenery and the need to invest in neglected and pointless elements
- the need for public, accessible and affordable toilets
- the need to enrich the space with additional equipment and furnishings (drinking fountains and a clock)
- the need to add elements to make the space more pleasant and encourage a longer stay in the park (water features, flower beds)
- the need to use the grassy areas for relaxation, for example by placing benches and tables or a new refreshment kiosk with a seating area
- the need for pointers so that everyone knows where to go

4.2. People waiting for trains

“Overall, we can assess that those waiting for trains spend their time mostly in the vicinity of the station hall. However, the “surroundings” are not the immediate surroundings. We notice that some people are waiting on the plaza in front of the hall; these are mainly smokers, near the bins with ashtrays. Some of those waiting are sitting on benches in front of the hall (often mixed with the “locals”) and some are sitting on the grass between the hall and Opletalova Street (but also further away, on the grassy areas in the direction of the playground and on the other side at the beginning of the tip, on the grass and on the benches) – these are, according to our estimates, often foreigners. Some people are standing on the plaza where the fountain used to be and some are moving/sitting at the tip area (rather closer to the hall).”

(from field notes, 27 July 2020, early evening)

Characteristics

“A pleasant and at the same time uncomfortable wait. Pleasant because it’s outside, uncomfortable because there are unpleasant people and a neglected park.”

(27 July 2020, male, about 40 years old)

“A quiet zone before entering the busy hall.”

(27 July 2020, female, about 20 years old)

The Vrchlického sady Park is often used by passengers waiting for their trains. At first glance, we identified the people who were waiting in front of the station hall as passengers. A characteristic feature was their suitcases or backpacks. However, people waiting for the train use the whole area of the park – e.g., the playground or the tip, but more often near the hall.

The behaviour of those waiting in terms of their waiting place is defined by the season and the weather. While in bad weather it is more pleasant to wait for the train inside the station hall, in the summer there were significantly more people waiting outside. Often all the benches near the station hall were occupied, and some of the people were sitting on the grass.

A specific group of those waiting are **smokers**. Many of these people spend their time outside, even in bad weather.

Interactions between the individual groups

We are slowly making our way back to the front of the hall, where we want to address those who look like passengers today. Those who spend time in front of the hall, smoking, standing, sitting on a bench or on the grass nearby. We are not alone in addressing these people; several times we are overtaken by someone who is begging, probably for money or cigarettes. After that, our potential respondents often leave. Eventually we are able to address a few people who are standing by the bins/ashtrays and smoking. Mostly they are waiting for their trains.

(from field notes, 27 July 2020, early evening)

The interactions of those waiting with the other actor groups are very similar to those of the people passing through. **What is specific, however, is that those waiting usually stand in one place, so it is easier for the locals to approach them. Especially on the plaza in front of the station hall there are frequent interactions between those waiting and the locals.** The locals collect cigarette butts from ashtrays and often approach smokers asking for cigarettes or money. People who beg have different strategies to get money or things from those waiting.

A lady tells me that it is common for homeless people to ask for money for a train “home” but in fact they have been living at the railway station for five years and they are just trying to get money in this way. It is also common that someone buys them a ticket (for example to Slovakia) and then

a few hours later the homeless person cancels it and gets the money. The people also remove the stamps from public transport tickets and then sell them to foreigners.

(from field notes, 8 December 2019, morning)

It turns out that waiting people also have strategies to avoid contact with the *locals*. For example, we observed the strategy of a smoker who first pretended not to speak Czech so that he did not have to reject a begging woman outright.

A woman with a crutch broke away from her group and walked over to a boy (about 20 years old) who was smoking next to me and asked him for a cigarette. The boy said in English that he did not speak Czech, so the woman asked him in English. He replied in English that he only had hand-rolled cigarettes and would not have given her any, anyway. Then the woman turned to me and asked me for a cigarette in English. I gave her four; she asked for more, but I said it was enough. When the group left, the boy told me in Czech that it was admirable how homeless people could adapt to foreign languages, that he had not expected the woman to want anything else if he talked to her in English, and that in the time he had been smoking four people had come up to him and asked for something, either a cigarette or advice.

(from field notes, 29 December 2019, afternoon)

Needs and visions

We think it is a good point that the outside area/park serves as a waiting area for the train. A waiting area that meets some of the passengers' requirements (fresh air, possibility to smoke, enough space, more quiet), but definitely does not work according to their expectations. Waiting outside feels like a kind of "forced compromise" between the positives of the outdoor space and the negatives of the Main Railway Station's departure and arrival hall.

(from field notes, 27 July 2020, afternoon)

The space outside was generally perceived by our communication partners as quieter than the space inside the hall, which we see as a great potential for the park or at least a part of it to become a kind of "outdoor waiting area". Especially in good weather, those waiting quite often seek fresh air, and so there is a "demand" for outdoor space. Throughout the research we encountered people waiting outside, especially in the summer – sitting on benches, sometimes on the grass or moving around.

Given that we often encountered a bias towards the park cleanliness in the accounts of our communication partners (some even believed that the area was infectious), we wondered how it was that others waiting were not "shying away" from the grass. In some of the interviews with those who were sitting on the lawn, we confirmed that those people were not familiar with the shared idea of the Vrchlického sady Park as *Sherwood*. These were mainly tourists waiting for the train. For them, it was just *a park by the railway station*.

We also met a large family with several small children on the lawn. They were waiting there even

though they perceived the park as dirty and dangerous (especially because of the threat of injection needles). They moved around the park several times in an attempt to find the “safest” place possible. They said it was much better to wait outside even in those conditions than to be inside the hall with small children.

A specific area that is used by those waiting is the children’s playground. We observed those waiting with children there, for whom the station hall was also not adequate for their needs. The playground is perceived by parents with children as a safe space, separated from the rest of the park by high fences, a gate and a guard, and at the same time the children can have some fun while waiting for the train.

Surprisingly, however, **the playground area was occasionally also used by individuals without children who were looking for a quiet place while waiting.** Those, however, were women only. Men said they would never go to the playground without children as they were worried about appearing out of place.

Near the station hall, in the area around the bins, waiting people often smoke. However, there are no “facilities” in that area and therefore they are not protected from adverse weather conditions such as rain or the harsh summer sun. There are no ashtrays in the immediate vicinity of the hall, where the people can be more protected thanks to the roof, and so cigarette butts usually end up on the ground. There is a cleaning service of the station hall. The fact that there are no bins in front of the hall is probably due to the attitude of the Správa železnic (Railways Administration) management and the decree that officially restricts smoking in the immediate vicinity of the railway station.

We encountered a lot of littering of the area in front of the station hall with cigarette butts. Ashtray placement and capacity are inadequate.

The area in front of the hall is owned by Správa železnic (Railways Administration) all the way to the two support columns, around which there are a lot of cigarette butts. What I am saying is that I find it interesting how many smokers go there and that some ashtrays should be provided. A lady tells me that ashtrays are already set up on the bins and that the bins used to be by the columns in front of the hall, but the premises belong to Správa železnic (Railways Administration), which has banned the bins, so they had to be moved to where they are now, because according to a decree you cannot smoke within 100 metres of the railway station. The bins, therefore, were probably too close to the railway station.

(from field notes, 2 January 2020, afternoon)

Related to the above are the following needs of the people waiting:

- the need for a quiet and safe waiting area with sufficient seating capacity.
- the need for barrier-free passage through the park and into the station hall (for people with disabilities and also for the smooth movement of people with suitcases).
- a visible board of train departures and sufficient clock placement would be advisable for waiting in the outdoor area.
- the waiting area should be comfortable and safe for people with children.

- there should be a sufficient number of public, accessible and affordable toilets.
- garbage bins should have sufficient capacity and the area in front of the hall should be cleaned frequently.
- the area around the bins should be protected, for example, by a roof in case of bad weather.

4.3. “Locals”

K. says we do not have democracy yet; it will be in twenty or thirty years, maybe. I understand that he actually perceives himself as an outsider, on the fringes of society; he says he is “at the foot” of the imaginary social pyramid he is talking about. He feels that he is unwanted by mainstream society. Among “his own” people, on the other hand, he is clearly a very distinctive personality.

(from field notes, 20 December 2019, afternoon)

Characteristics

In this text we use the term “*locals*” to refer to people who are united by, among other things, the large amount of time they spend in the park and the fact that the park is a meeting place for them, for some even a “home” where they are staying.

We also include users of illegal substances, homeless people and socially vulnerable people coming for work who do not have accommodation or standard housing in Prague in this group. Many of the actors of these groups are also clients of organisations offering social services that intervene directly in the Vrchlického sady Park area or in the immediate surroundings. However, it is important to mention that not all clients of social services can be described as the *locals*. In addition, it is essential to remember that the *locals* are an analytically formed group based on our subjective observation and visits to the park. Some of the actors we mention here probably feel themselves as a certain group, as they referred to themselves as a community in some interviews, but we “*outsiders*” do not know who they include in their group and who they do not. Some of the people we refer to here as *locals* are, for example, against “*junkies*” or “*homeless people*”.

Based on the above, a synonym for the *locals* could be the term *socially vulnerable*, which was used by the contracting authority. **It is very important for us to point out how careful and cautious we must be when we write, read or even make decisions about this group or groups. It is essential to understand that the *locals* are the most vulnerable group in terms of possible future changes in the park space, as they may be completely left out of the participation process, or their presence in the space may not be taken into account, or they may even be deliberately driven out.**

We have chosen the term *local* because it is not stigmatising and, in our opinion, it expresses the relationship of certain social groups to the area well. As mentioned above, the *locals* spend a lot of time in the park, staying there and moving around in their own specific ways.

The specificity of this actor group is its social and spatial stratification. By specific movements we mean mainly movements off paved roads, i.e. on some beaten tracks, and on grassy areas and areas that are spatially separated from paved roads and places with a high concentration of people. These separated areas are frequently used for private or intimate matters that the *locals* pursue in the park because they often have nowhere else to go. The public spaces are privatised by the activities of the *locals*. These activities occurring off the main roads or outside areas with high concentrations of people may include, for example, private meetings, resting, sleeping, but also satisfying physical needs and the administration of illegal substances.

By specific presence and behaviour we mean that the *locals* often conspicuously congregate in the area, speak loudly, sometimes address passers-by or those waiting there with a request for change or cigarettes or with a comment, are surrounded by various sacs, plastic bags, alcoholic beverage bottles or other items that may be perceived as clutter. The *locals* often use the benches, where they spend a lot of time.

We also associate the *locals* with a sense that they privatise the space as a result of their extensive social contacts in the area, the degree of time spent in the area, and their superior familiarity with the space, especially the areas off the paved roads and outside areas with high concentrations of people. During our research in the park, especially around the benches, we often felt as if we were “inside someone’s living room” and invading their intimate space, which was uncomfortable from our point of view.

The *locals* are also probably the only ones who spend nights in the park. We did not try to find out how many people slept in the park at night and how often.

Interactions between the individual groups

The *locals* are perceived by the other actor groups as the most “controversial” group we identified in the area. Their specific presence and behaviour in the space is perceived negatively by most of the other actors from the other actor groups. People walking through the park, people waiting, policemen and policewomen, dog owners and dog walkers, businessmen and businesswomen, and parents of children often expressed a feeling of threat in relation to the *locals*, mentioning crime, dirt, various infections, aggression and violation of personal space (name calling, shouting...). The names of the *locals* given to them by informants, who expressed an unsympathetic attitude towards them, and which we picked up, are: *junkies, homeless people, (dubious) weirdos, “they”, “it”*.

Beyond this, we also identified recurring narratives. By narratives we mean accounts of what happens in the area, who is present there and why, and various evaluations of both the space and its functioning and the people who are there. We divided these narratives and evaluations into groups and called them as follows: *The locals are at home there; The locals need support and we need to offer that support; Social services feed the homeless, keeping them in the space; Social services attract drug addicts to the space; The locals in front of the Main Railway Station are a disgrace; The locals should disappear from the space; The park space should be open to all.*

Thus, in relation to the *locals*, various social groups dominated by an “intransigent attitude” towards the *locals* (see above) also come into conflict with those dominated by a conciliatory one, which are

mostly social workers. Within the “conciliatory attitude”, the naming of the *locals* appears again: *users of illegal substances, users, clients, homeless people, socially and economically disadvantaged people.*

An actor group that is also active towards the *locals*, which we have not mentioned yet, are the persons and institutions that are responsible for the administration of the space, *by which we mean the Prague 1 City Council, indirectly the Prague 2 City Council and the Prague City Hall.* These institutions and their employees have different attitudes towards the presence of the *locals* in the park space. In general, we have observed a rather “intransigent attitude” and an effort to push the *locals* out of the park through various steps on the part of the Prague 1 City Council, and a more benevolent and supportive attitude on the part of the Prague City Hall.

Therefore, in addition to trying to ensure safety and care for the area, we also see some of the measures in the space as an effort to limit the presence of the *locals*. These measures are evident in the materiality and functioning of the space. They include signs at the entrances to the park prohibiting access to the grass, sleeping and alcohol consumption, fences around some of the grassy areas, and Prague 1’s ending aid to the non-profit organisation Sananim, which regularly parked on a concrete patch in the “tip area”. However, Sananim has moved under the auspices of the Prague City Hall and remains in or around the space in another location.

Needs and visions

Among the needs of the *locals*, the first priority is for them to be able to continue to use the space and not to be left out of participation and thinking about how the space will look and function in the future. It is important for the specific form of the space that places remain and are added that can provide enough privacy for the *locals*. These are different types of spaces.

- additional toilets should be added to the area; the toilets should be at least minimally enclosed, also usable by women (unlike the urinals currently present), and should be free of charge.
- spaces should remain in the area where social services can operate. Such spaces should be “better quality” in the sense that they should be fixed or brick-and-mortar places.
- the activities of providing social services to homeless people and people excluded from housing in the Vrchlického sady Park should be linked to the efforts of the Prague City Hall and other actors from among social service providers or non-governmental non-profit organisations to reduce homelessness and housing need in a proactive, systemic and coordinated manner⁷.
- the activities of social services provision in the Vrchlického sady Park should be further developed in cooperation with the Prague City Hall and the Centre for Social Services Prague, in line with the efforts to decentralise social services and with the concept for addressing homelessness in Prague that is being prepared.
- places should be left in the area that can provide a safe place for the *locals* to deal with

⁷ Kocman, D., Lesák, V., Bírová, B., Snopek, J., Ripka, Š., Hon, M., Valouch, D., Čihák, J. and Stockelová, T. (2019). Systémové řešení bytové nouze rodin a jednotlivců na úrovni obcí (Systematic solutions to housing needs of families and individuals at the municipal level). Prague: Social Housing Platform.

personal issues, e.g., with social workers and others. Such places should be off busy roads and busy areas in general.

The presence of the *locals* in the space is rather controversial and constitutes, as we would like to stress, a political issue. During our research, we found that most people who did not classify themselves as the *locals* and were not professionally connected to them, perceived the *locals* as an intrusive and unpleasant element in the park that should go away. On the other hand, however, during our relatively long presence in the space and after several in-depth interviews, we came to the conclusion that the Vrchlického sady Park was, for several reasons, a place from which the *locals* would not disappear, and if they were deliberately driven out or displaced, they would simply move a little further away.

In our opinion, the reasons are the following:

- The Vrchlického sady Park is located in the city centre, with a high concentration and fluctuation of people, which creates good conditions for those who are dependent on others (begging for cigarettes, food, money, etc.)
- The Vrchlického sady Park is part of the existing drug market (it is one of the “peaks” of the drug triangle of Můstek-Muzeum (Museum)-Hlavní nádraží (Main Railway Station)).
- The Vrchlického sady Park is a central transport point. It is “*the shortest connection of all public transport routes in Prague*”⁸ and therefore an ideal meeting place.
- The Vrchlického sady Park is a relatively quiet place in the city centre where you can sit or find privacy.

We therefore think that the space should remain open to all. It is also important that it should not be transformed all at once, as the *locals* who spend time there would suddenly be pushed out of the space where they are used to being and where they have learned to live, where they get social contacts and health and social assistance, and where they may feel to some extent “at home”.

4.4. Dog owners

After a while, I return in front of the main station building from the road. I see a woman, a dog walker, with two dogs. She moves atypically, off the paved areas, on the grass along the “main corridor”. First on the side further away from the railway station. Then she moves to the grassy square between the hall and Bolzanova Street.

(from field notes, 20 December 2019, afternoon)

Somehow we get to the mess in the park... She says there are “local dog walkers” in the park, but also people who just pass through with their dogs, and that those do not clean up after their dogs.

⁸ Quote from an interview with a social worker (6 January 2020)

(from field notes, 4 August 2020, evening)

Characteristics

Dog walkers or dog owners are people who either walk their dogs regularly in the Vrchlického sady Park, or just pass through the park with their dogs or wait for a train. Dog owners do not usually walk only on paved roads, but also use the grassy areas for walking their dogs, often regardless of whether the area is designated for dog walking or not. There are allegedly areas directly reserved for dogs on the grass, but they are not clearly and distinctly marked in the area, although they are specified in the ordinance on the use of the park, according to municipal police officers.

Some dog walkers, we refer to them here as the “local dog walkers”, go to the park regularly; they know the park and have their “own” part of the park or a place where they go. They often know each other, either personally or by sight. **The important thing is that they tend to take care of the park and clean up after their dogs. These are mostly residents from the wider area.**

Dog owners who walk their dogs in the space only occasionally, e.g., on the way to the train or when they pass through the park, use the space in a similar way. It should not be forgotten, however, that while local dog walkers take excrement bags with them if necessary, dog walkers passing through usually do not have any, and if they do not find them in the park, it may happen that they do not clean up after their dogs. One informant, a local dog walker, even tells us that she usually takes several excrement bags to the area so that she can give them to other dog walkers if necessary. She said there was a shortage of dog excrement bags in the area.

Interactions between the individual groups

Dog walkers are not a very numerous group in the space, but they often return regularly and spend a lot of time in the park, tens of minutes on average. We have observed problematic relations with the *locals* (see above, the chapter “Locals”), or with municipal police officers (ibid.). From the point of view of dog owners and dog walkers, the *locals* are perceived as a disturbing, unpleasant, often even threatening element in the park. It should be mentioned, however, that dog owners and dog walkers are used to them and have somehow learned to coexist with them. The most common strategy is to avoid the *locals* and the places where they are most often found, and to walk the dogs in the “quieter” part of the park, which usually means the “tip”. The prevailing narrative towards police officers on the part of dog owners is that “*the police do not deal with the situation here at all, so they are actually responsible for it in a way*”.

Needs and visions

For dog owners and dog walkers, the space works as follows:

- one of the few places in the city centre where they can walk their dog or dogs in the green (in the playground area we have even encountered rabbit walking).
- one of the few places in the vicinity of their homes where they can walk their dog or dogs if they live nearby.
- as a space in which they need to move and stay in a specific way: e.g., to walk on the grass,

to clean up after their dogs, to spend more time in the space than just walking through it.

On this basis, we believe that there **is a need for grassy areas to remain in the park where dogs (and other animals) can be allowed**. We recommend the reservation and clear marking of such areas in the park for consideration. **Another challenge could be to add more stands with dog excrement bags or water dispensers**. As dog walkers also use the park early in the morning and late in the evening, it is important that the park is well lit, not only the paths but also the grassy areas. We ourselves were afraid to walk on the grassy areas, especially in the dark, as we encountered a used needle lying in the grass several times. The last need that we will mention here is **that the park should be pleasant for dog owners and dog walkers: safe, cared for, equipped with modern, functional and well-maintained furniture, especially benches, that will be inviting rather than repulsive**.

4.5. Residents

We decided to have a look at what houses were lit at night to get an idea of how many residents lived near the park. We counted only five houses where the lights were on. Those could be residential houses, but are more likely office buildings, at least a half of them (...). There were no lights on in any houses in Washingtonova Street except hotels.

(from field notes, 28 July 2020, night)

Characteristics

During the research we did not meet any residents who lived in the immediate vicinity of the Vrchlického sady Park (in the streets and houses immediately adjacent to the park). However, we met several residents from the more distant surroundings (Opletalova and Jindřišská Streets, for example). These residents also fall into the group of “dog owners”.

A characteristic of the residents we spoke to in the field was that they had lived in the area for a very long time, perhaps even decades, and they had also observed and known the park for a long time, so they had an opinion about how the park had evolved. More often than not we heard that the space had improved, with fewer unpleasant places and conflicts, but sometimes we also heard the opposite opinion that the space had deteriorated or was getting worse in that respect. **The fact that residents think about the park in the long term and form opinions about the space shows, among other things, that they have a relationship to it and that it is important to them.** They also often saw the park as the only green place in the neighbourhood, as “*green in a concrete jungle*”⁹, “*the only park far and wide*”¹⁰, a place that is “*downtown but not in the very city centre*”¹¹.

Residents who have been coming to the park for a long time also have rich memories associated with

⁹ Resident and dog owner, about 40 years old

¹⁰ Resident and dog owner, about 65 years old

¹¹ Resident and dog owner, about 65 years old

it. For example, a resident recalled going sledding in the park as a child or that there used to be a water body there. A topic that resonated among the residents was the traffic situation in the area, which was perceived as poor. **The topic of the new tram line was also frequent; it was perceived as something that was threatening the traffic situation, which was already bad, or something that would reduce the green area of the park.**

The proposed tram line was perceived as primarily negative and appeared to have been poorly communicated to the local residents, as illustrated in an interview with one of them: “Nobody asked us about the tram line” and “Prague 1 does not respect the local people (residents)”.

Interactions between the individual groups

The residents were particularly unhappy with the litter in the park, which they associated with the *locals*. The *locals* were also perceived as a potential danger and an unpleasant, even outrageous element in the area. Like the “dog owners” (the group of residents is more or less a subset of them), they are more or less used to the *locals*’ presence. However, that does not mean that they have a conciliatory attitude towards them.

Needs and visions

Residents are a small actor group that is significant because the park is part of their home neighbourhood.

Their needs include a sense of safety in the park and an unproblematic passage through the park to the station hall (where some of the residents do their shopping at Billa). A playground can also be important to them. They would like a well-kept park, planted with trees – the greenery should definitely not disappear or diminish, and the furnishings should be nice.

4.6. Establishment operators

“Originally, there was going to be a café there that would operate every day, and we actually wanted to invest that money immediately in cultural events that were supposed to be held several times a week. From lectures and workshops to concerts and theatre performances... we also wanted to have an open-air cinema there in the summer. That was the original plan, and after we had been open for a month, we found that there wasn’t a sufficient accumulation of people there to make the business viable in that model, and we found that the cost of running a café there was so great that it was just unprofitable. So eventually I stopped the then model and we only opened on certain days when there was a concert in the evening.”

(from an interview with the Wander Bar operator, 9 January 2020)

Characteristics

In this section we will focus on the establishment operators in the Vrchlického sady Park and its surroundings. In the park itself, we noticed several business activities. These included a newsagent’s,

a refreshment stall, temporary market stalls and a bar that organised cultural events. **In the area adjacent to the Vrchlického sady Park, we identified 77 establishment operators based on research and field observation. The list included operators in Bolzanova, Senovážné náměstí, Opletalova, Politických vězňů and Wilsonova Streets and some establishments in the adjacent Jeruzalémská and Washingtonova Streets. We further divided the establishments into several categories, according to the type: Services (31); Hotels and restaurants (21); Retail stores (12); Municipal and government services/institutions (6); Educational facilities (3); Corporate headquarters (3+); Clubs and societies (2).** We omit social service providers here, as they are dealt with in a separate section.

The establishment operators in the area were selected to cover their different focuses. Specifically, we conducted in-depth interviews with 11 operators in cooperation with the Prague Institute of Planning and Development. Thanks to its location in the centre of the city, the park area is very suitable for many service providers and companies. On the other hand, doing business directly in the park has proven to be very problematic due to frequent thefts.

The staff of the services located in the park are very familiar with the space and usually have many ideas on how to improve it. Employees of the services in the area also know the park very well. The representatives and employees of the services are therefore valuable partners in the participation, as they have been following the development of the Vrchlického sady Park for a long time.

However, the relationship of these actors to the park space is ambivalent. Some do not have any deeper connection to it, they just want to get through it quickly to work. Others, on the other hand, have a close, even warm relationship to the park. It was the close relationship and good knowledge of the area that was expressed in the response of one of the service representatives in the area. He perceived the park as very communal, saying that everyone knew each other there: *“it’s like a small village within the city”*.

The Vrchlického sady Park can be viewed from the windows by many of the service providers in the area all day long.

Interactions between the individual groups

The relationship of this actor group to the park management is significant, whether it is property relations towards Prague 1 or the Prague City Hall in general, or relations towards specific representatives of the aforementioned institutions (park manager, representatives of Prague 1).

The actors also have a relationship to the *locals*. Similarly to other groups, they perceive the *locals* as a major problem in the Vrchlického sady Park. However, as one communication partner mentioned, the problem for him is not homeless people as such but aggressive drunken behaviour. This captures an important fact: although our communication partners often identify homeless people as a problem, deeper conversations reveal that certain behaviours and criminal activities are particularly problematic.

During his interview, a restaurant operator mentioned specific problems that threatened his establishment: constant urination of drunks on the walls of the railway station, homeless people lying and sleeping on the sides of the building, in front of the storeroom doors, conflicts of homeless

people in the park (the terraces must be fortified with a fence to separate them from the park), cars entering the park”¹².

It is not uncommon for the local service providers to have direct experience of criminal or otherwise problematic activity by some individuals. Service providers right in the park have experienced theft so frequently that it makes it impossible for them to do business in the area.

He (a salesman) tells us that the work is terrible in this place and immediately adds that he’s quitting in a month. He states the behaviour of the homeless people as the reason. They allegedly steal customers’ food, harass them, touch the food on display and disrupt the business. A homeless woman reportedly stole his corn. He sees her regularly in the park, but doesn’t try to address the theft any further. He says it’s impossible to work there. He has rented the stand and doesn’t know what will happen to it after he leaves. He doubts that anyone could do business well in the park.

(from field notes, 11 December 2019, evening)

It is important to remember that the second part of the research took place in the aftermath of the coronavirus crisis, so it is likely that business activities were affected by that. In the winter phase, there was a refreshment stand and a bar (which should have been open for the summer season) in the Vrchlického sady Park. In the summer phase, neither of the establishments was there anymore. The reason for this is certainly not just the coronavirus crisis, but it certainly contributed to a quicker exit. During the winter part of the year, both of these services already showed extensive problems related to crime in the park and poor communication with Prague 1.

Service providers in the area also mentioned problematic and sometimes even criminal behaviour of some people in the park. The high incidence of theft in the park is related to the relationship between service providers and security forces. Thefts are allegedly so common that the establishment operators do not even report them to the police any longer. We have encountered the opinion of the relevant actors that it does not make sense anyway, that the police are not able to solve the thefts (see the section on security forces).

Needs and visions

Because the actors work and spend a lot of time in or around the park, they have specific needs that are only partially met, or the actors are afraid that the revitalisation of the space will make the conditions even worse.

Since not many residents live in the immediate vicinity of the Vrchlického sady Park (see the section on residents), the establishment operators in the neighbourhood are essentially substituting the voice of the residents. As they are near the park every day, they have similar demands on it as residents. What is specific to these actors is the need for peace and quiet. The communication partners mentioned noise as a common problem. The Vrchlického sady Park is in the city centre, so it is clear that traffic will cause some noise. However, a significant concern was the planned tram line, which would cause tram traffic to pick up and the noise situation to remain unbearable. For example,

¹² From an interview with an establishment operator.

the language school in the adjacent area can no longer open its windows during classes because of the noise.

Another specific need relates to sufficient parking spaces. As mentioned, not many residents live near the park. This is also reflected in the occupancy of parking spaces. According to one communication partner, parking spaces are available on weekends and outside of working hours. During working hours, the parking situation is said to be very bad.

The actors would welcome the opportunity to use the Vrchlického sady Park for relaxation after work. Unfortunately, due to the neglect of the park, this is not possible now. The actors often reported using the shops and restaurants in the station hall.

This group has many ideas and visions for the future of the park, often related to cultural use (for example, using the former fountain as an amphitheatre for cultural events). In this regard, it is important to mention that the implementation of specific visions is very demanding in terms of bureaucracy. Specifically, the communication partner who ran a bar in the park listed many beneficial projects that he could not finance and that Prague 1 did not support in any case.

Unfortunately, all of our ideas, whether it was a playground, a skate park or an outdoor gallery, (...) came to nothing because we didn't have the money to finance them ourselves. We are trying to make it happen through subsidies or grants, but it is quite problematic. (...) I think that this kind of action should not come from me (...) but rather from the city hall.

(an interview with the Wander Bar operator, 8 January 2020)

This group was the most likely to use bicycles for transportation, hence their needs for a bike path.

4.7. Park administration

Characteristics

We understand the actor group of park administration as a network of relations between the Prague City Hall, the Municipal District of Prague 1, the Municipal District of Prague 2 and Správa železnic (Railways Administration), i.e. entities that have some kind of property rights connection to the park and the area around the Main Railway Station. The complicated property relations, where the defined area is owned by the Capital City of Prague and administered mainly by the Municipal District of Prague 1 and partly by the Municipal District of Prague 2 and Správa železnic (Railways Administration), result in constant tension and mutual negotiation of positions, ideas and interests, manifested on a daily basis.

Overall, the definition of park administration is closely related to the park's operating rules, where the idea of compliance defined in the rules does not meet the reality of the practices taking place in the park. We write more about this in the section on the space.

In addition to this, the park administration includes cleaning services and general services ensuring

the functioning of the park (maintenance of trees, greenery, paths, etc.), which are hired and coordinated by the administration. These “administrative services” provide part of the cleaning in the area. Other cleaning is provided by non-profit organisations. The entire cleaning activity, which was mostly assessed by the communication partners as intensive, visible and useful, is coordinated by the municipal risk reduction coordinator in Prague 1, who also acts as the manager of the space.

Interactions between the individual groups

The complexity of the relations is most evident in the issues of the overall approach to the park development plans, including the tram line initiative, where it seems virtually impossible to simply start a joint discussion between the Prague City Hall, the Municipal District of Prague 1 and the Prague Institute of Planning and Development, and it appears that any hint of discussion about possible transformation is a major political matter.

The complexity of relations and decision-making about interventions in the space is reflected not only in the property relations mentioned above, but also in the interests of all other stakeholder or actor groups that are addressed in the document. This is manifested in the general attitude to maintenance and cleaning of the park, and in the issues of social services (what services, for whom, how often and why at all).

Needs and visions

Two main needs emerge from our research experience that could be further addressed in a follow-up participatory process. The first concerns the long-term coordination of cooperation, where it will be clear to all stakeholders who is in charge of what, what is expected of them and why, and this discussion will be appropriately facilitated with emphasis on the different needs and positions of the different actors. The second need relates to communication in general, whereby the intended actions of the other entities will be explained to the stakeholders in a timely and adequate manner and a suitable system of mutual information exchange will be set up; such a system is currently lacking and the situation thus allows for the intensification of existing or potential conflicts.

4.8. Security forces

What was probably the most important thing for them (municipal police officers) to tell us, and for us to tell other people, was that their work was made very difficult by the current legislation concerning mainly alcohol consumption. They said this was one of the biggest obstacles to being able to somehow deal with people sitting on the benches or the general situation in the park. With the current legislation in force, they say they cannot take action against anyone who does not consume alcohol directly in front of them, even if the person is obviously drunk and causing public outrage. In fact, they perceived the public outrage as one of the main pitfalls of the “locals” – they are visible, it is a disgrace to the park, they can be seen drinking alcohol by children, etc.

(from field notes, 31 July 2020)¹³

¹³ From an interview with two municipal police officers who were on patrol in the park that day.

Characteristics

The security forces include mainly the municipal, state and criminal police. Peripherally, the security service employed by Správa železnic (Railways Administration) can also be included in this category, but according to our findings it operates mainly in the station hall and adjacent areas. In addition, this includes cameras installed in the park area. The municipal police officers come to the area on a daily basis. They work as patrol and regularly walk through the park. They deal primarily with illegal consumption of alcoholic beverages, minor altercations, harassment, persons who cause public outrage and disorder. On several occasions we also saw the patrol navigating those who did not know their way around the park.

It is important to note that the patrols in the Vrchlického sady Park keep changing, with around twenty pairs rotating. Thus, there is no specific patrol that is in charge of the park and can deal with issues in the area based on day-to-day experience. In addition, the municipal police officers clean the area of used needles at least once a day. They are also called to the area in varying degrees of intensity by those who find a used needle in the grass or elsewhere and want to have it removed. The municipal police also deal with part of the cleaning activities in the area.

The state police officers mostly move around the park in cars, which is one of the aspects that shape the functioning of the space. We often saw them congregating on the concrete patch at the tip of the park, where they parked.

Interactions between the individual groups

We found the relationships between the security forces and the *locals* most striking, probably because they were the most visible. Communication between security forces and the *locals* occurs on a daily basis. The police are trying to “discipline” the *locals* in the area: to deal with situations where the locals are drinking alcoholic beverages there, but also drinking alcohol in general, which is illegal in the park, to deal with potential altercations, and to make sure that the park is not in disorder. A frequent strategy of the police is to ask the *locals* for their identity cards by picking them up off the lawn or benches and attempting to make them uncomfortable and thus likely to limit their presence in the area. As a result, the *locals* try to avoid police officers, so that they can use the space in a way that suits them.

In the context of attitudes towards the *locals* in general, we also noticed conflicting relationships between security forces, the *locals*, social workers and other groups. In this case, the security forces (the municipal and state police of the Czech Republic) serve as an actor group that acts as a lightning rod for the discontent of all the other groups. The locals feel “wronged” by them, the social services perceive them as a generally hostile group towards them and their clients, and among the other groups the narrative “*the police do not deal with the situation here at all, so they are actually responsible for it in a way*” prevails.

It may be interesting to note that, according to social workers, about ten years ago the municipal police set up a meadow in the area for a short period of time, which they reserved for people using illegal substances. However, the state police reportedly disagreed with the meadow, so it did not last long. Let us not forget that conflicts can also take place between different police forces.

Security forces are generally perceived by most members of the other actor groups as ineffective in the face of the park problems such as loitering and theft. On the other hand, the presence of security forces is valued as a promise of security in potential conflict situations. **The presence of the security forces is required, but at the same time there is dissatisfaction with what the public expects of them, i.e. to be able to exclude from the area persons who engage in disruptive activities such as making a mess, drinking alcoholic beverages, begging, loud or harassing communication, etc.**

Needs and visions

From what we gathered, the needs of the police officers extend far beyond the park space. Their work is hampered by legislation that is difficult to enforce (see the opening quote). Besides, based on our observation, it is important to note that it is possible to drive through the park in cars or park police cars in front of the station hall. A vision that we noted more than once among the police officers was one in which the park benches, on and around which clutter accumulates and which they referred to as infectious, would disappear from the park in the future. From the point of view of the police officers, the benches are closely linked to problematic activities, but also to the appearance and health of the locals: *The benches were described (by police officers) as problematic not only because the locals often consume alcohol there and offend passers-by, but also because they were perceived as “infectious”. Homeless people and others are said to be frequently sick, pooping and urinating directly on the benches, and often have open wounds. The police officers would never sit on one of the benches themselves, but then again they don’t want to tell people who are “decent” how disgusting the benches actually are because it would scare them away.*¹⁴

4.9. Social services and civic initiatives

Characteristics

Together with establishment operators, social service workers are the stakeholder group with whom we conducted the largest number of in-depth interviews within the research. They know best the needs of the *locals* or at least their clients. It is therefore very important not to omit them from the participatory process. They are key to improving the social problems in the Vrchlického sady Park.

In total, we spoke to social workers from three non-profit organisations that had outreach programmes in the park. According to the information we have found, the following social services are located or have outreach programmes in the area of the Vrchlického sady Park (or in its immediate vicinity):

- The **Salvation Army** aims to support people of all ages physically, socially, morally and spiritually, based on Christian principles. The target group of the Salvation Army is all those who find themselves in a difficult life situation, but also those who are looking for any kind of spiritual help or support.¹⁵

¹⁴ From an interview with two municipal police officers who were on patrol in the park that day. (31 July 2020)

¹⁵ <https://armadaspasy.cz/o-nas/kdo-jsme/>

- **Drop In o.p.s.** is a non-governmental non-profit organisation focused on providing health and social services primarily to non-alcohol drug users, their families and other close persons.¹⁶ The Drop In non-profit organisation operates an outreach programme in the Vrchlického sady Park, the aim of which is to monitor the space, find clients and offer them social services, especially the exchange of used needles for new ones. **During the research, the field workers worked in the area of the park and Wenceslas Square daily from 12 to 2 PM, and on weekends from 2 to 4 PM. They did not have one fixed place in the Vrchlického sady Park, but they moved more or less in the same locations.** They were relatively easy to recognise by the portable yellow container for used needles. According to one of the social workers, Drop In planned or still plans to take an ambulance to the area (as does Sananim z. ú.). However, complications have probably arisen regarding this vision, as the Municipal District of Prague 1 has terminated its cooperation with Sananim z. ú.¹
<https://www.dropin.cz/>
- **Medics on the Street (Medici na ulici)** is a student association of future health care professionals interested in the issue of homelessness and providing health care to people in need.¹⁷ We never met the students in the field, but we learned from our communication partners that they intervened in the park (probably irregularly) once a week to treat those who came to them. They reportedly carried out their activities at the Fellowship Monument and the Wilson Monument.
- **Hope (Naděje)**, a day centre in U Bulhara Street (Prague 2) and day centre in Bolzanova Street, focuses mainly on helping homeless people. In the day centre, clients can spend the night, take a shower, get some food, seek medical help and more. According to our information, a clean-up was (and may still be) taking place in the park under the auspices of Hope. Clients of Hope had the opportunity to clean for a financial reward. During the winter part of our research, we met the cleaners from Hope every time we visited the space.
- **Progressive o.p.s.** focuses on providing quality and professional services to persons at risk of substance abuse through specific and innovative programmes in the area of harm reduction.¹⁸ However, Progressive o.p.s. probably has an outreach programme in the park as well. In addition, it manages two containers for used needles (see the map in the document entitled “User habits and needs in the Vrchlického sady Park and the surroundings of the Main Railway Station in Prague”), around which it also maintains order.
- **Pleasure Without Risk (Rozkoš bez rizika)** is a non-profit organisation that focuses on people who work in the sex industry. In particular, it seeks to improve the status of sex workers and to prevent and reduce the risks associated with working in the sex industry¹⁹. The outreach programme in the Vrchlického sady Park has been running since the beginning of this year. The field workers are not marked in any way when they work in the park (unlike workers of other social services), so they cannot be identified by sight. This is because of their target group of clients, who require anonymity for the sake of safety.
- **Sananim z.ú.** is a non-governmental non-profit organisation that has been working in the field of drug addiction since its establishment in 1990. It provides assistance to people at risk

¹⁶ <https://www.dropin.cz/>

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/Medicinaulici/>

¹⁸ <http://www.progressive-os.cz/progressive/o-nas/>

¹⁹ <https://rozkosbezrizika.cz/>

of drug abuse and their relatives through a network of programmes and services that form a comprehensive system of prevention, care, treatment and re-socialisation.²⁰ In the Vrchlického sady Park, Sananim z.ú. operates a pedestrian field service two days a week and an ambulance three days a week; the ambulance used to be parked on a concrete patch in the tip area, but at the end of July the Municipal District of Prague 1 terminated its cooperation with Sananim and, since then, the ambulance has been using one of the streets adjacent to the park. The field workers of Sananim do similar work to those at Drop In and, in addition, offer infectious disease testing and treatment to non-alcohol drug users in the ambulance.

- **Civic initiatives**, which include actors we heard about or saw directly in the park doing “charity work”, while not being a classic established social service, were mostly about distributing food and drinks in the winter months. Specifically, during the winter part of the research, we often heard about a nun handing out food in the morning, and once, on Christmas Eve, a caravan came to Opletalova Street from which people were handing out hot food to the homeless. Reportedly, there are more such initiatives in the area.

Interactions between the individual groups

Based on this list, it is clear that there are many services in the Vrchlického sady Park area, a relatively small park, that focus on helping the most vulnerable groups: homeless people, users of illegal substances and others at immediate risk of acute poverty. This fact was obvious to most of our communication partners. Thus, in this context, we encountered two dominant narratives in the space: *Social services feed and care for the locals, drawing them into the space and keeping them there*; and on the other hand: *People in need of social and health assistance naturally congregate in the area and need to be helped right there*.

We perceive both those narratives as valid, both describing the situation in the park from different angles. On the one hand, we are inclined to the fact that the Vrchlického sady Park is a place that for various reasons concentrates socially and economically endangered groups of actors (see above the chapter “Locals”) and, on the other hand, it seems desirable to decentralise social services (again, see above, the chapter “Locals”). A quote from a social worker on this issue: (...) *I think it makes sense to have food given out in a coordinated manner in multiple places at the same time, and I think it makes sense to disperse those groups, why not. (...) On the other hand, the people we are talking about (clients of this social service, but also most of the locals) travel by public transport. And this is actually the shortest connection of all public transport routes in Prague. Maybe even with trains, and Central Bohemia, so it's to be expected that the place will always have a greater concentration. In that (drug) triangle, metro lines and tram lines converge.*²¹

The first narrative mentioned above (*Social services feed and care for the locals, drawing them into the space and keeping them there*) was heard in the context of the presence of social services in the space mostly from those who simultaneously expressed an “unfriendly attitude” towards the locals; these were mostly from the actor groups of residents, passers-by, those waiting for trains,

²⁰ <http://www.sananim.cz/o-nas-1.html>

²¹ from an interview with a social worker, 6 January 2020

businessmen and businesswomen, but also some from the security forces group. However, with these groups we occasionally encountered unfamiliarity with what social services specifically did in the park. The people's ideas about the social work were often far from reality. For example, when asked about the concrete patch in the tip area, one communication partner told us that they "*give out amphetamine to junkies there*"²².

The second narrative (*People in need of social and health assistance naturally congregate in the area and need to be helped right there*) was heard from most of the actors of the social service and civic initiative groups, but rarely from actors of the other groups. Among the arguments for the necessity of outreach social services in the Vrchlického sady Park, especially those oriented towards users of illegal substances, there is the above-mentioned argument that the area around the Main Railway Station is part of the drug market in the city centre, where "*300 to 500 people move around, looking for drugs or wanting to sell drugs*"²³. As a result, according to social workers, the park should be covered by outreach services from 10 AM to midnight every day.

The *locals* themselves did not comment much on the presence of social services. Interestingly, in one of the interviews, one of us was automatically believed to be a social worker by the communication partner, even though we said we were field researchers. From field notes: *He (the communication partner) saw social workers as intermediaries between "those at the top" and the locals. He said social workers tended to do what "those at the top" wanted, but the social workers around him did what he wanted. I perceive a certain duality in his statement: people in power want something and I want something, and these two goals are different. In social workers and their work, perhaps these two different interests can somehow come together.*²⁴

We estimated the *locals*' attitudes towards social services mostly by observing that social workers were actually intervening in the area and their services were being used.

We also heard several times in the field that the communication partners were using the opportunity to spend the night and take a shower at the Hope Day Centre, or that they went there for meals, to see a doctor, etc. Yet one of our communication partners called Hope "*Hopelessness*".

Needs and visions

Everyone's upset about the needles that are strewn about. (...). I think some space somewhere nearby where people could use drugs in peace without being disturbed would be nice. And, of course, to have somewhere to dispose of the infectious or used needle afterwards. And get a clean one in return. I think that if there was some space like that, the number of trouble spots with needles would certainly be greatly reduced. (...) Well, at least an area where the application ambulance or caravan could go. (...) So that it's not there all the time, but so it could come and go, have a dedicated parking place.

²² from an interview with one of the resident dog owners, 19 December 2019

²³ Quote from an interview with a social worker (6 January 2020)

²⁴ From field notes (20 December 2019, afternoon)

(quote from an interview with a social worker, 6 January 2020)

Secure the place so that it's not so easily visible to the general public (the place where the outreach programme takes place) and where the outreach programme could go. But there are so many non-profits here, how many places would there have to be (laughs)? Like we would be taking turns in one?

(quote from an interview with a social worker, 21 July 2020)

I think it'd be nice if there was a way to dilute this so there'd be more places (where social services would be available) in the neighbourhood. That would then mean that maybe those people (the locals) would have no interest in just staying there, on the benches, or they would have a place to sleep, etc.

(quote from an interview with a social worker, 6 January 2020)

One of the frequently mentioned topics was the need for fixed or brick-and-mortar locations where social workers could offer their services, and the need for these locations to be decentralised rather than centralised in one place.

(...) On the other hand, I think this is the way to go. Find more places out there that someone would take care of, and those people would mix. That our clients would be there, but at the same time there would normally be other people and staff there to take care of the place and clean up.

(quote from an interview with a social worker, 6 January 2020)

Other ideas were aimed at making the Vrchlického sady Park function as one space open to all that would be maintained and cared for at the same time. As regards the furnishings and equipment, the idea was also that a needle exchange machine could operate in the space during the night hours when social services are not working.

4.10. Fauna

There were rats everywhere (during the reconstruction of the sewer system at the National Opera two years ago). It was really disgusting. Especially in the evenings, just when food was being served, you literally did trip over rats. Then some widespread extermination took place, so the situation got better, but it really had been something. I think that maybe one of the big problems is that you can see the places where these rats live, they have burrows, holes, and yet they're still everywhere. But it's not to the extent it was two years ago.

(quote from an interview with a social worker, 6 January 2020)

Characteristics

In addition to dogs that usually visit the park together with their owners, pigeons and especially rodents are present in the area after dark. We saw a family walking a rabbit in the area of the

playground where dogs are not allowed. Of course, insects are also present in the space.

Needs and visions

In this report, we see the needs of dogs as identical to those of dog owners.

4.11. Flora

M. talked a lot about the state of the greenery in the park; I think the state of the greenery in the park was actually what bothered her the most about the whole area. She often pointed out the condition of the trees and said that this year was worse than the last and that she thought most of the trees would just need to be cut down. She showed me the dried up treetops and thinning branches. Suddenly, I noticed the trees and their condition even more and it seemed to me that they were in a desolate state indeed. She also commented on the poor care of the shrubs and lawn, according to her. She said the lawn should be sprinkled at least a little bit because it was in a location that should be representative.

(from an interview with one of the cleaners, 4 August 2020)

Characteristics

In the Vrchlického sady Park there are relatively many mature trees and shrubs. Grass is planted under and around them in designated areas. In addition, there is one bed with flowering plants. The mature trees appeared to us to be mostly old. There were holes in the trunks of some of them, probably made by rats. As one passer-by aptly observed, *“there are no young trees here; when the existing ones die in a few decades there will be no new trees here”*²⁵.

As for the bushes and shrubs, especially along Opletalova Street and around the playground, we saw a lot of litter – garbage, human faeces, drug application residues. In the bushes up next to the station hall, in the southern part, the bushes functioned as dwellings for those who spent the nights in the park.

The classic short-cut lawns without flowers worked well in the space, in our opinion. As the benches are only placed around the paths in the area, in the warmer months the lawn serves as a place to sit and wait for the train. We have come across this kind of use quite often. In addition, the lawns were used as areas for walking dogs, and less often as areas for leisure activities, such as playing with a ball. It should be noted, however, that only isolated groups or individuals, most of whom we identified as foreigners, were using the grassy areas for leisure activities, besides the *locals*.

A dendrological study has also been prepared for the purposes of revitalisation; it deals in detail with the assessment of the condition of the trees in the Vrchlického sady Park.²⁶

²⁵ from an interview with a passer-by, male, about 40 years old, 15 July 2020

²⁶ Dendrological survey of the Vrchlického sady Park area, 2020, prepared for the Prague Institute of Planning and Development.

Needs and visions

- The lawns and especially shrubs tend to be polluted to varying degrees in different places. Trash is lying around (less frequently), the lawns and bushes are polluted with urine and in some places even faeces, and several times we came across a used needle in the grass or bushes. The most urgent need is therefore a thorough and frequent maintenance of the green areas.
- The presence of shrubs and bushes in the area is recommended for consideration as this is where most of the litter is.
- More or less all of our communication partners appreciated the mature trees in the space, and many even imagined more trees in the park.
- Some mentioned that they would like to see beds of flowering greenery in the space.

5. Space

In the first part of the research, we imaginatively divided the Vrchlického sady Park area into several sections. This division was quite intuitive at first, but gradually we began to define what made particular spaces specific. We identified several different areas, depending on how they were (not) functioning, or how important they were for the functioning of the park. For greater clarity, we drew these spaces in an orientation map (p. 9) in the document “User habits and needs in the Vrchlického sady Park and the surroundings of the Main Railway Station in Prague”.

In the first report we already briefly characterised why we perceived the park to be divided into two large sections according to their character (**the central and tip parts**). We combined the character of **the space in front of the station hall** with the idea of a square – a place used by many actor groups, where people met. There is a **concrete patch** at the tip; it is astonishing that such an unused space could exist in a park in the city centre. The **playground** is separated from the rest of the Vrchlického sady Park. Only certain groups of actors come there. It is very interesting to see that people from other parts of Prague also use the playground. **Communication partners also came to the park from the outskirts of the city just to visit the playground.**

Now we need to add more spaces to the list and describe what is specific and important for the planned transformation of the Vrchlického sady Park.

5.1. Rules for using the park

If you enter the park via one of the busier routes, you will find a sign at the entrance with rules for using the park. The signs cannot be found in all places where you can enter the park.

According to the sign, it is forbidden to:

- enter the park in all kinds of motor vehicles except for wheelchairs for the disabled and cars with a valid permit from the Prague 1 City Council and the Integrated Rescue System vehicles
- use alcoholic beverages and narcotic or psychotropic substances
- damage or pollute the park vegetation, equipment or furnishings
- light or maintain open fires or use pyrotechnics
- camp or sleep at night
- walk on the lawns (exceptions to this prohibition are indicated by graphic pictograms)
- hold promotional, advertising or other events without permission
- ride all kinds of means of passenger transport
- use the equipment and furnishings in a way that causes public outrage or by persons who cause public outrage.

Graphic pictograms below these points again indicate the prohibition of alcohol consumption, the prohibition of lighting fires, the prohibition of sleeping on the benches and on the grass, and a warning that there is a CCTV system installed.

We consider it important to mention here that, according to our observations, almost all of these

prohibitions are violated in the park area. How is that possible?

- 1) Most of the prohibited activities mentioned above had already been going on in the area before the signs were installed. The signs are probably at least partly a reaction to what has been happening in the space for a long time and is perceived as offensive and inappropriate.
- 2) There are no graphic pictograms directly in the area to instruct visitors on which grassy areas they can walk, where they can walk their dogs and where they cannot, etc.
- 3) Compliance with the rules for the use of the space is not strictly required, and in particular in some cases is only required of the group of the *locals*. The thing is that the rules for using the park are not communicated clearly enough to visitors. As we mentioned above, nowhere in the area or on the information sign is it clearly marked which grassy areas are intended for walking dogs and which are forbidden to enter. Another thing is that we have observed that this prohibition ends up being enforced in practice in such a way that only those whose presence in the park is judged inappropriate by those who administer the park and exercise power there are required to comply with it.

As far as the consumption of alcohol is concerned, the entire Vrchlického sady Park is designated as an area where the consumption of alcohol is prohibited by Decree No. 12/2008 Coll. of the City of Prague²⁷. Compliance with the decree is monitored in the area by municipal police officers. However, they say they can hardly prosecute those who consume alcohol in the area because of the current legislation (see the chapter on security forces).

Similarly, according to the police officers, non-compliance with the other prohibitions such as defacing or littering, drug application, and sleeping around are also difficult to prosecute on a daily basis. This is because the officers would have to catch the perpetrator in the act. The next thing is the enforcement of any fines, as many of the *locals* who are primarily affected by the bans in this area are in a very poor socio-economic situation.

However, it is not only the *locals* who break the bans, as we have witnessed many times. One of us also rode a bicycle in the park once, for example. It is also important to mention the frequency of breaches of the prohibitions, which is so high that the prosecution of individual non-compliance is meaningless. The prohibitions therefore had a very unclear effect on us; they often seemed even discriminatory or unnecessary in their vagueness and inconsistency.

5.2. Main corridor

So far we find that the busiest part of the park is a kind of corridor from the Main Railway Station building to the tram stop, along which most of the park benches are located. These benches are mainly occupied by people we consider to be the locals; that is, those who obviously spend a lot of time there, but there are also people who use the benches only temporarily.

(from field notes, 4 December 2019, morning)

²⁷ https://www.praha.eu/jnp/cz/test/vyhledavani_v_pravnich_predpisech/rok_2008-vyhlaska_cislo_12_ze_dne_20_06_2008.html?fbclid=IwAR2LIImk9R0_G1N6mmWbklZkgmZXCRbJP6C_pNcGPOBiPC2rwepm68ubFscU

As the *main corridor* we call the busiest transit route leading from the Hlavní nádraží (Main Railway Station) tram stop to the area in front of the station hall or to the station hall. People with or without luggage walk there (or possibly go in a wheelchair, exceptionally on a bicycle); they usually walk quite fast as some of them hurry to catch their train. Passers-by do not really stop, and it was quite difficult to stop them for interviewing for a few minutes.

Security forces, ambulances, cleaning services and other vehicles involved in the maintenance of the area travel in cars along the *main corridor*.

The *locals* spend a lot of time there, sitting on the benches, and in the warmer months also on the grass around. From observations and “go-along” conversations with the *locals*, we found that the *main corridor* also functioned as an important meeting place for the *locals*. The circular space near the Fellowship Monument is a good place for larger groups to stand around and meet, especially the *locals*.

The *main corridor* is a distinctive area within the Vrchlického sady Park. One of the reasons for this is the fact that it is a space where, like the space in front of the station hall, actors from all the actor groups actually meet. If one wants to change from tram to metro or train or vice versa at the *Hlavní nádraží (Main Railway Station)* tram stop, the only way to avoid this area is to go around the park via Opletalova Street, which is a relatively lengthy option in transit. The main corridor is therefore a place that is designed in such a way that passengers are to some extent forced to pass through it.

Most of our communication partners associated unpleasant feelings with that space, especially because of the *locals* sitting around. We encountered the following names for the space: “death alley”²⁸, “phobia alley”²⁹, “primary route to the metro”³⁰, “roundabout”³¹.

5.3. Parking lot and the part extending from Politických vězňů Street to the parking lot

This section was only included in the second part of the research, i.e. the “summer” part.

The parking lot is very busy at this time of the day (weekday afternoon), it is full, there are only a few parking places left (...). According to him and the woman who is with him, drivers come here for shorter periods of time (probably tens of minutes or a few hours), rarely for longer periods (overnight) or regularly.

(from field notes, 14 July 2020, afternoon)

The parking lot is situated in the furthest corner of the park towards Wenceslas Square, which it

²⁸ from an interview with an actor who had been collecting money for a charity organisation for a long time (8 December 2019). The naming is based on the fact that various physical altercations are said to happen in the area and that ambulances are most often brought there.

²⁹ from an interview with a businessman who ran a snack stand there for several months (11 December 2019). The name “phobia alley” is also based on the fights that allegedly happen most often in this area.

³⁰ from an interview with a social worker (21 July 2020)

³¹ probably a name given by the *locals*; it refers specifically to the circular area near the Fellowship Monument. One communication partner told us that the origin of the name probably consisted in the fact that police officers in cars turned around in the spot.

adjoins. The parking lot is owned by the Technical Administration of Roads of the City of Prague (TSK) and managed by a hired company that employs a 24-hour guard. The parking lot appears to be a completely separate part independent of the rest of the park. We did not even encounter the guard walking through the park to work. They either drive or use the elevator from the metro, which is located next to the parking lot. The only connection between the parking lot and the rest of the park appeared to be those who walked through the parking lot into the park. The guard called them “*junkies*”. According to our findings, these are often clients of social services who move around in the centre, probably between Wenceslas Square and the Main Railway Station.

The area next to the parking lot looked very unkempt to us. It is dominated by a relic of a hardly identifiable architectural formation. There is a lot of trash and drug application residue in the grass. In these places we saw actors spending time who we would probably classify as the *locals* or social service clients.

The path around the parking lot and the area next to the parking lot were also used by others who we would classify as passers-by/passengers/tourists. Since they were mostly unfamiliar with the area, it was obvious that they were not navigating well. Crossing the road in Politických vězňů Street was particularly problematic, as after crossing the road there is no easily identifiable pavement in the rest of the *tip area*. For further passage, therefore, the beaten tracks and the shortcut across the concrete patch are frequently used.

5.4. Opletalova Street

Opletalova Street skirts the western boundary of the park and is less busy than the paths that run through the park’s interior. In the central part of the park, specifically opposite the station hall, it is one of the main access points to the park. Opposite the station hall there is a parking place for electric scooters and bicycles. There is also a place where taxis park and a place that we identified as a space where people wait for taxis or alternative services such as UBER. This place is bordered only by a few green posts and people often cross the road with their luggage if their car arrives from the opposite direction. We therefore did not find this place safe for waiting and getting into cars.

Opletalova Street continues to serve as a place for people to take their luggage out of and load it into their cars in the direction of the playground.

Finally, Opletalova Street is also the only place from which the playground is accessible. Some users of the playground saw this as problematic, as they felt that there was a lot of traffic in Opletalova Street and therefore it was dangerous for children entering or leaving the playground area. We see this solution as one of many strategies to separate the playground from the rest of the park as much as possible.

5.5. Underpass

Rather, it is a system of multiple underpasses to facilitate pedestrian movement. One underpass leads from the *tip part* under the main road to the State Opera House. It is followed by a second longer underpass, which leads to the old Main Railway Station building and the station platform.

No directions are provided, which makes the underpasses very confusing. According to our observation, pedestrians use them only to a small extent. As the underpasses are secluded and relatively quiet, people who need to do some activities in private often find refuge there. We came across used needles and other clutter. The underpass also serves as a toilet.

I know from various people I've spoken to that they see it more as an area they avoid. Which, on the other hand, I see it from a work perspective as a good place for our clients. (...) For consultations, for example, because there is a smaller concentration of people there and you can meet there.

(an interview with a social worker, 21 July 2020)

The main road forms one of the biggest barriers in the Vrchlického sady Park area. The underpass does allow pedestrians to go under the main road, but it is definitely not a barrier-free route. In the future, it would be more appropriate to plan other options for crossing the main road.

5.6. Area around the former fountain



Next to the newsagent's in the central part of the Vrchlického sady Park there is a relic of the former fountain. Now there is an unused and very neglected concrete patch, in the centre of which there is a damaged transformer station with street art, a portrait of a woman.

In their interviews, the communication partners often mentioned it as an example of the neglect of the park. This space has no defined function, it looks nonsensical, but like the space in front of the station hall, it gave us the impression of a square. People were also meeting there, sitting on the walls, waiting and smoking, even though to a lesser extent.

5.7. Grassy areas

It is important to mention that in the Vrchlického sady Park there are various grassy areas which have different characters. Some are used almost exclusively by the *locals*, others are common destinations for dog walkers. The grassy areas directly in front of the station hall are most often used by those waiting for trains. The use of the grassy areas by specific actor groups was discussed in the previous section.

5.8. Toilets

The most significant problem is the already mentioned lack of barrier-free, affordable toilets. Many places in the Vrchlického sady Park are often used for urination and defecation. This causes degradation of the area in sanitary terms, destruction of vegetation and bad odour. All this makes staying in the park unpleasant.

The main problem is that the public toilets in the station hall are not affordable. Also, the barrier-free toilets in the hall are quite a distance from the park area. Access to the nearest indoor toilets is via a staircase.

There are two urinals in the park. However, this solution should only be temporary. The urinals often offended our communication partners, especially for aesthetic reasons (*“The biggest atrocity is the urinal – it’s not aesthetic”³²*). They are also problematic as they only solve the issue of urination for men.

According to them (police officers), urinals in the park are rather offensive; they are not well covered and those who use them are too visible. One of the police officers says: “it’s almost better if they pee behind a large bush”. The opinion that the urinals are too conspicuous and therefore a nuisance is encountered quite often, and may be the reason why men still urinate near bushes and trees in the park despite the urinals having been installed.

(from field notes, 31 July 2020, afternoon)

5.9. Problematic areas

We have already discussed the spatial problems of the Vrchlického sady Park in the document entitled “User habits and needs in the Vrchlického sady Park and the surroundings of the Main Railway Station in Prague” (especially in the section on barriers, page 10).

A big problem is the non-conceptual design of the space. There are meaningless elements (e.g. the former fountain area) that have no official purpose. Of course, the actors do adapt to such a space in some way, but it makes it difficult for them to be in the park. It is interesting, for example, to

³² an interview with a passer-by, 6 August 2020, afternoon

observe some fences (barriers) in the park that were purposely placed to prevent passers-by from walking off the designated paths. It is strange to observe the paradox of a piece of grass being protected rather than a more convenient and intuitive passage through the park being preferred. Observation of the area also revealed that the paths in the park were not connected to the surrounding streets and especially to pedestrian crossings. The often imperfect nature of the path network is again evidenced by the numerous beaten tracks (see the map of paths in the document “User habits and needs in the Vrchlického sady Park and the surroundings of the Main Railway Station in Prague”, page 17), which make it easier for people to pass through the park.

5.10. Closed areas

In the introduction we mention that **we perceive the Vrchlického sady Park as an open space; however, we have also encountered areas in the park that are closed to some or even most actor groups. Most of these areas are not closed materially but rather socially, by which we mean that a certain group of people occupies the area in question and excludes other groups from using it in various ways.**

An area that is separated both materially and socially is the playground, which we have already mentioned several times. The playground is primarily intended for children and their parents. A high fence, a shrub barrier and a single usable entrance guarded by a security guard ensure that its use is avoided by other groups. The playground is thus an almost completely enclosed space. At the same time, the playground area is equipped with toilets and drinking fountains, so only some people have access to these facilities. It is important to mention that while some people are comfortable with such a “fortified” space and perceive it as pleasant, others are not and feel too cut off from everything else.

Other areas are some grassy areas or parts of them, which are privatised by the *locals*. These are the parts that are more remote, and the fact that they are privatised by one group does not interfere too much with the use of the park by other groups. However, visually this phenomenon is visible and may be one of the reasons why some people do not feel comfortable in the park. Similarly, some benches tend to be privatised by the *locals*, too; if this is too obvious, it discourages most actors from the other groups from using the benches nearby. Among the spaces privatised by the *locals*, we can also include the underpass or a set of underpasses leading from the *tip area* and the two “tubes” or glass “towers” leading from the area in front of the station hall up to the parking lot. As the underpasses are a place that is also materially enclosed (it is isolated both spatially and acoustically), they become a place that can be considered dangerous. Similarly, the “tubes” are one of the sites where people do drugs.

6. Conclusion and recommendations for further planning and development

As we have already mentioned, the Vrchlického sady Park is a problematic, multi-layered, ambiguous and paradoxical space. It is associated with a multitude of (often contradictory) ideas, needs, motivations, feelings and naming, activities, relationships and practices. **The characteristics of the space of the Vrchlického sady Park and the surroundings of the Main Railway Station in Prague should be planned to be further developed in such a way as to bring together their users, while at the same time the defined space should provide places where the individual actor groups can function undisturbed.**

In the present document, we have already summarised specific recommendations in the individual sections, contextualised in relation to the characteristics and needs of the individual actor groups. Therefore, the following is a general summary of recommendations valid for basic consideration of further planning and development of the Vrchlického sady Park and its surroundings³³:

- sequencing and phasing of development and redevelopment.
- clear and understandable park rules that apply to everyone.
- connecting paths to pedestrian crossings and better routed paths through the park overall.
- as part of the solution, think primarily about easy maintenance and daily care of green areas (similar to e.g. in the Čelakovského sady Park³⁴) and cleaning (also at weekends) with a specific focus on cleaning of injection material (and increasing the capacity of waste bins for injection material).
- affordable, barrier-free, well-designed, easy-to-maintain public toilets
- repair and unification of the equipment and furnishings.
- redevelopment and use of now meaningless areas and elements (concrete patch, former fountain).
- architectural design and transformation of the park to be consulted with representatives of social services.
- clearly define a place dedicated for social services (a daily place to turn to).
- the space should be as clear and transparent as possible, and care should be taken to ensure sufficient lighting in the areas off the designated pavements to reduce unpleasant places during evening and night hours.

³³ We have already published recommendations for the Vrchlického sady Park area in the “Research on interventions in public spaces burdened in a similar way as the Vrchlického sady Park and the Main Railway Station area”.

³⁴ Čelakovského sady is a park near the Vrchlického sady Park. It underwent revitalisation in 2018. For the sake of comparison, we also spent part of our research in the Čelakovského sady Park; from our point of view it has undergone a successful transformation. It was the very visible and frequent (probably daily) care that was important.