

MY UPCE



MAGAZINE
OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF PARDUBICE

2025/2026

On its Final Mile

Student Radek Vrba tested parcel delivery by cargo bike – and even rode it on holiday.

6

Tracing Gadolinium

Chemists Marek Tykva and Jiří Palarčík are turning healthcare waste into reusable substances and packaging.

10

Mirroring in Litomyšl

Students of the Faculty of Restoration created a sgraffito on the wall of an old waterworks building.

42

“Pardubice Helped Me Breathe,” Says Mayuka from Japan

She spent one semester at the University of Pardubice and managed to travel across much of Europe. She fell in love with svíčková with cranberries and even spiced up an alumni gathering with a musical performance. How did she enjoy her stay in Czechia?

12



20

MY HOBBY**Skill Set: Building Drones, Custom Microscopes, and Writing 70-Page Assignments**

Jakub Ešpandr built his first drone more than ten years ago. Today, he's running a budding startup. A student of the Faculty of Economics and Administration, he loves pushing things beyond their limits.



Read MY UPCE
online!



34

ALUMNI**"I see the patient as an object. I have to."**

Graduate Josef Strašík answers calls on line 155, heads out into the field, and serves as the ambulance spokesperson.

EDITORIAL**Jan Brothánek, Head of Residence and Catering Services, University of Pardubice**

3

PIXEL**Celebrating the Start of the Academic Year**

4-5

PHENOMENON**On its Final Mile**

Radek Vrba from the Faculty of Transport Engineering isn't a passionate cyclist. But on a cargo bike that delivers parcels straight from the depot to customers, he'd happily set off on holiday.

6-9

THEME**Tracing Gadolinium**

Marek Tykva and Jiří Palarčík from the Faculty of Chemical Technology study medical waste. They aim to recycle useful substances and save packaging from ending up in the incinerator.

10-11

GENERATION**"Pardubice Helped Me Breathe," Says Mayuka from Japan**

Mayuka Fujiwara came to the University of Pardubice from Japan for Erasmus. She travelled, tasted Czech food, and even performed at the alumni reunion.

12-13

MY PROJECT**When Your Leg Becomes a Consumable**

Fresh graduate of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Informatics, David Hybeš, lost a leg. He's not giving up and wants to run a half marathon.

14-15

ALUMNI**The Art of Perceiving Art**

Restorer Veronika Knedlíková Wanková lives in Italy and, through her project, explores how perceptions of art have changed.

16-19

PHENOMENON**Supervision is a Tool – You Just Need to Use it Right**

It's useful and helps with workplace conflicts as well as burnout. That's supervision, which Adéla Michková from the Faculty of Health Studies has been successfully practising for 20 years.

24-27

ALUMNI**Off to Ethiopia for Czech Beer**

Lukáš Horník, a graduate of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Informatics, brought a condensate collector to life in an Ethiopian brewery. Working as an electrical project designer, he fulfilled his dream.

28-29

THEME**Youth Elects Youth.****"It's amazing," Says Anežka Nedomová, a Newly Elected Deputy.**

The voices of young people and women propelled Anežka Nedomová, a graduate of the Faculty of Arts, into the Chamber of Deputies. What goals does this 24-year-old student have?

30-33

GENERATION**Amalia in Paris****"I've basically become a Parisian – and apparently I look *très chic*," Says a Student from Pardubice**

Amalia Scheer, a student of the Faculty of Economics and Administration, went on Erasmus to the city of fashion. How is life and studying there? And is she fulfilling her dream?

38-41

THREE QUESTIONS ABOUT...**Mirroring in Litomyšl**

Students of the Faculty of Restoration created a sgraffito on the wall of an old waterworks in Litomyšl, replacing an unsightly graffiti.

42-43

We have 21st-century housing

Your own bed, a bookshelf, a desk with a chair, and a place where you can eat well and affordably. These are a few of the concerns that plague many university students at the beginning of the academic year. Fortunately, we can help them with that. We are the Halls of Residence and Catering Service (HRCS), and we ensure the comfort of students at the University of Pardubice. But let's start from the very beginning... The year was 1950. Pardubice did not yet have a university, but the city already had its first university students who needed a place to stay. Where was that? Perhaps at the Libuše Hotel near the old train station, in wooden dormitories in Olšinky, or in various temporary buildings around the city. The conditions were very modest and often did not meet even basic standards. However, the desire to create a place for studying was stronger. Then came the first real dormitory – Mír in Rožkova Street. And in the 1960s, the foundations of the campus in Polabiny were laid. The KA, KB, and KC dormitories were built... and finally KD, which became a symbol of student life in the city. Some have already undergone reconstruction, and in 2025, the KD building also underwent a complete transformation. Only the skeleton and perimeter walls of the original structure remain... It has been our most significant investment to date. Thanks to this, students have modern apartments, study rooms, and common areas that correspond to 21st-century living. Today, we offer nearly 1,300 beds. We manage five dormitories on the Pardubice campus and one in Litomyšl.



The accommodation there is a special case. Almost twenty students live in a beautiful historic building, a 17th-century Piarist college. Nothing can match its unique atmosphere.

And what about the dining hall? The first attempts at catering took place in the Na kopečku restaurant.

As the number of students grew, so did the need to provide these services in appropriate premises. In 1965, we opened a brand-new dining hall on the Polabiny campus, and later two food outlets were added – in Doubravice and on Čs. legií Square. The outdoor terrace of the hall has also been renovated and is now covered.

Eating a meal in the dining hall has become part of the daily routine at the university – the smell of lunch, queues, and conversations at the table. Places where friendships are formed and ideas are born.

However, the main characters in the stories of Pardubice's dormitories and dining halls are not just buildings. It is mainly the people – former and current colleagues who have always taken care of ensuring that students have a place to live, something to eat, and feel at home – who deserve a big thank you. But we must not forget all the generations of students who lived, studied, loved, and dreamed here. And our story continues... for 75 years already.

Jan Brothánek,
Head of Residence and Catering Services, University of Pardubice

MYUPCE

MAGAZINE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PARDUBICE 2025/2026

Rectorate, Promotion and External Affairs, Organisation ID: 00216275.

Address: Studentská 95, 532 10 Pardubice 2 **Phone:** +420466036413, +420466036406 **E-mail:** myupce@upce.cz

Web: www.upce.cz/press **Chief Editors:** Zuzana Paulusová, Martina Macková, Lada Součková

Editorial board: Lucie Košťálová, Petra Bajerová, Martina Macková, Adrián Zeiner

Language editing: Zaan Bester **Translations:** Language Centre of the University of Pardubice

Photo-documentation: University Conference Centre – Adrián Zeiner, Petr Špaček, Radek Plžík, Milan Reinberk (FChT),

Michal Král and the UPCE archive **Graphic design and setting:** Andrea Hájková

The editors reserve the right to abridge and edit the texts.

Print: Printing and Publishing Centre of the University of Pardubice, 2025, print run: 800 copies



UNIVER

PHOTO Jan Vlasák

How does the University of Pardubice celebrate the start of a new academic year? In a grand way – together with students from all seven faculties, full of colour and energy, creative workshops, useful study information, opportunities to meet new people, and endless conversations. Add dancing, a concert by a local band, and good food and drinks, and it becomes the biggest event of the year... Příliv.



On its Final Mile

TEXT Zuzana Paulusová • PHOTOS Adrián Zeiner

Cycling has never particularly appealed to Radek Vrba from the Faculty of Transport Engineering. But the moment he climbs onto a special cargo bike, he suddenly turns into a keen cycling enthusiast. This, however, is no ordinary bike. It transports parcels and letters from the depot to customers – and collects data along the way. The aim? To make last-mile delivery in the city both more efficient and more environmentally sustainable.

It's the first of July. In the courtyard of the university campus, an unusual machine is preparing for its big moment. It looks a little like a cross between a rickshaw and a small delivery van – a sturdy frame, a two-wheel design, and at the front a large lockable cargo box. Researcher Radek Vrba is carrying out the final checks: tyre pressure, battery level, tablet connection. The bike is about to set off on its very first long journey.

"I'm taking it along the cycle path to Hradec Králové. We're handing it over to one of our partner companies, which will be testing it in real traffic. It will be transporting parcels and collecting key data about last-mile delivery," says Radek, clearly looking forward to the ride. The route from the campus to Hradec Králové is roughly 25 kilometres. "I've been taking it for short rides around the campus, but I'm really excited about this longer trip."

For now, the cargo box remains almost empty – just a few essentials inside. Radek genuinely enjoys the research work involving the cargo bike and is grateful he can be part of Assoc. Prof. Libor Švadlenka's team, which has been studying last-mile delivery for many years.

After a quick team photo with the cargo bike, Radek climbs on. The electric bike sets off smoothly and silently. The handling is easy, and the electric motor

provides a welcome boost – something the young PhD student deeply appreciates. He arrives with a smile, not even breaking a sweat. The bike performed flawlessly for the entire journey.

"It's ready for handover. Testing it in real operation will be incredibly valuable – I'm already looking forward to the first results," he adds.

🔵 **You clearly enjoy riding the cargo bike...**

I have to say – it really is something else. I genuinely enjoy riding it. It's great fun.

🔵 **Do people give you strange looks when you ride past?**

Not really. There's already a similar bike in Pardubice – one courier uses it to deliver food.

🔵 **But you don't deliver food... What exactly will this bike carry?**

Cargo bikes are designed to transport a wide range of parcels within the city – from small to medium-sized ones. These are the kinds of items people usually order from online shops and expect to receive quickly at a place of their choice: at home, at a pick-up point or in an automated parcel locker.

🔵 **How does the delivery process actually work?**

We focus on the very last part of the delivery chain – known as last-mile delivery. This is the stretch from the final depot or warehouse to the customer. When you order something online, the parcel first travels

from the central depot to a regional distribution depot. In our region, one is located between Hradec Králové and Pardubice. From there, parcels are dispatched to customers.

Traditionally, they are delivered by diesel vans directly to the customer's address or to a pick-up box in the city centre. A more environmentally friendly alternative is to deliver the parcels by van only as far as a micro-depot within the city, transfer them to a cargo bike, and complete the final part of the journey this way. But that's just one option. In another project, our research team is also examining crowdshipping – another modern method of last-mile delivery.

❗ Why is the bike operating in Hradec Králové and not in Pardubice?

Because Hradec Králové already has an established cargo-bike delivery system. The company we're collaborating with specialises in this type of delivery and has been working with our team for years. And as a bonus, the bike also promotes the Faculty

of Transport Engineering "across the border". (laughs) Of course, we would love to see cargo-bike delivery introduced in Pardubice as well. In one of our previous projects, we identified suitable locations for micro-depots – now it's up to the city council to decide.

❗ Does this type of delivery work in other cities as well?

Yes – it's already quite common internationally.

In the Czech Republic, cargo bikes operate for example in Prague. Micro-depots there are located at Florenc and Anděl, with plans for more. Their bikes usually have the cargo area at the back – a safer option when entering junctions, as it improves visibility and the bike doesn't feel as long.

❗ But your bike carries the load at the front – why?

At the start, we defined several technical requirements: minimum payload, power output, battery capacity, and the ability to install sensors for collecting various types of operational data. A Dutch-style cargo bike best met these criteria.



“The motor helps, but it certainly won’t do the pedalling for you, as some people might think.”

When the bike arrived, my colleague Petr Polívka – who helped with the electrical installation – and I fitted it with the data-collection technology. So far it includes weight sensors, GPS, a gyroscope, temperature sensors, and current/voltage measurement. More sensors are planned. Once everything was installed, we set it up and began testing.

❗ Is it difficult to ride a cargo bike?

You need a little time to get used to it – especially how it behaves when turning. Because the cargo box is at the front, the steering responds with a slight delay. It takes a moment for the bike to follow where you point the handlebars. But after a short while, you adapt.

❗ What did you test before handing the bike over?

Besides testing basic riding performance, we had to make sure the data collection worked exactly as intended – that’s crucial for us. Static tests helped confirm the correct setup and automation, so everything activates at the right moment.

After plenty of flat rides, I took it up the only significant hill in the area – Kunětická hora – to see how both the bike and the measurement system cope with an incline. Even with maximum assistance and a heavy load, the bike still showed a range of 120 kilometres.

❗ How heavy can the parcels be?

The cargo box can carry up to 100 kilograms and has a volume of 375 litres. You always need to take both the cargo weight and your own weight into account. Riding a bike with a few letters feels very different from riding with several heavy parcels or a bulky load. Fully loaded, you need to think carefully about how you take corners, how fast you go downhill, and whether you can stop safely at the bottom. With a hundred kilos up front, you have to be cautious – physics will not be cheated.

❗ How does the bike collect the necessary data?

The entire process is automated. In the morning, the courier taps “play” on the tablet, starts the app on their phone, loads the parcels and sets off – almost

as easily as pressing play on the TV. The rest runs automatically: the route is recorded together with all delivery data, which is sent straight to the server. In the afternoon, after returning, they stop the recording on both devices, connect the bike to the charger, and the routine repeats the next day.

❗ Can different couriers ride the bike?

Yes, and that’s actually ideal. It gives us a broader range of riding styles and levels of motor assistance. It also reveals interesting differences. The data shows which power modes couriers use and how much energy they consume. The motor can help a great deal – which naturally affects battery life. And once the cargo box is empty, the bike rides far more lightly.

❗ How many kilometres does the bike cover per day?

So far, around 25 kilometres per day – but we’ll know the real figure once we collect more data. It depends heavily on the parcel load and the route taken.

❗ Does the bike go out in all weather conditions?

In summer, yes. But the courier’s safety always comes first. So in snow or ice, the bikes stay put – that would be more of a suicide mission...

❗ Still – fresh air, a bit of exercise...

True. The motor helps, but it certainly won’t do the pedalling for you, as some people might think.

❗ How long will the bike be in test operation?

For a full year. What’s great is that the data will reflect the entire annual cycle – including the holiday period – allowing us to compare different usage scenarios. Winter months will definitely have an impact, and we’re keen to see exactly how.

❗ How much data do you have so far?

The bike has only been in testing since the summer, so it’s still far too early for concrete conclusions. For now, we’re mainly checking whether everything functions as it should. But I’m very curious, so I download the data every single day.



❗ What will be the outcome of your analysis?

Primarily recommendations for practice. We want to describe this delivery method thoroughly and help expand it to other locations. In Pardubice, this means preparing the ground for this alternative transport system once the micro-depot is built. We want to identify the optimal way to operate these bikes: how to ride them, when and where to charge, which battery to use, what parcel weight is ideal, how temperature affects battery performance, and much more – including route optimisation.

❗ What are the advantages? Ecological reasons as well?

Absolutely. It's an environmentally friendly form of transport that reduces emissions and noise in urban areas. The number of parcels transported daily keeps rising. Urban traffic is becoming denser, so alternatives are needed, and people are increasingly receptive to them. E-bikes are booming, which naturally drives this shift. Sustainability is a major theme today, and this concept fits perfectly within it. Cargo bikes also have very low operating costs.

❗ Can this method be faster?

Yes. In dense urban traffic, a bike can sometimes be faster than a car, particularly when using cycle paths while cars sit at red lights or in traffic jams.

But it depends heavily on the route, the number of stops and the infrastructure. Practical experience shows that micro-depots located close to city centres significantly improve delivery efficiency, because parcels travel the shortest possible distance.

❗ Is there anything else needed for the system to function well?

We need to continue developing cycle paths and linking them into a single, coherent – and safe – network. Cargo bikes follow the same traffic rules as other vehicles, so they can use both cycle paths and regular roads.

❗ Can you imagine other uses for the bike?

During an internship in Germany, we saw how Deutsche Post uses cargo bikes, which was very inspiring. They can be used for a wide range of routine city-maintenance tasks or cleaning. In Prague, they even showed us that an entire music band could fit into one.

It's also an excellent commuting option: you load whatever you need, set off, stop wherever necessary, and on your way home easily pick up your shopping. Some people use them for trips. Personally, I can imagine going on holiday with one – and I was never much of a cycling fan. (laughs)

Tracing Gadolinium

TEXT Zuzana Paulusová • PHOTO Adrián Zeiner

The healthcare system, through medical care and examinations, generates different types of waste. Is such waste recyclable, and are there any important substances that can be recovered from it? Marek Tykva and Jiří Palarčík of the Faculty of Chemical Technology looked into the waste generated by MRI examinations and recovered one important element from recycling this waste: gadolinium. They also believe that more elements can be recovered.

The starting point for the cooperation between Marek Tykva and Jiří Palarčík was a thesis analysing a metal called gadolinium. During the defence of Marek's thesis, he had to answer a number of tricky questions asked by Jiří Palarčík, who is today his colleague at the Institute of Environmental and Chemical Engineering. Jiří found the topic interesting and wanted to guide Marek in a different direction. Later they realised that the best thing they could do would be to join forces.

A low-profile metal

"In the periodic table of elements, gadolinium is on the very bottom row. It is a rare-earth metal. At first sight, it is not very special. It is a silvery-white metal that can look like white powder," says Marek, a PhD student. The beauty lies, however, in its properties. "It absorbs a great amount of neutrons and thus can shield against radiation. That is why it is used, for example, in the nuclear energy industry," he notes. It is also used in healthcare, for example in MRI scanning. It is part of the contrast agent administered to patients before the scan. "It is administered either intravenously or as part of a special drink for patients with suspected cancer. Thanks to the agent, the image has a better contrast and any abnormalities are more easily visible," Marek explains the use of gadolinium in healthcare. Patients then discharge the contrast agent in their urine.

Many types of waste

Initially, the team had two options to recover gadolinium. Both used waste. "Marek's thesis focused mostly on the analytical aspects. He wanted to know whether the amount of gadolinium in wastewater could be determined and how to extract it from the wastewater," Jiří explains the initial thoughts. This, however, involved certain risks. "If gadolinium is discharged into wastewater in human urine, it becomes a highly hazardous material. This makes working with gadolinium more difficult and not really economical," he adds. That is why he wanted to suggest that Marek look for the residues elsewhere – in hospitals, to be precise. The contrast agent is taken from 30 ml vials and administered to patients depending on their sex, weight and organ characteristics. Even though not the entire amount is necessary for one examination, the rest is no longer usable. In other words, the remainder of the agent in the vial is considered toxic waste that needs to be disposed of.

Run on hospitals

"Healthcare waste disposal is governed by the Waste Act. Most often, it is taken directly to incineration plants," says Jiří. However, both Marek and Jiří agreed this was a shame and came up with an alternative "There are contrast agent residues in the vials and syringes with rather substantial amounts of gadolinium. In addition, this eliminates the hazards



of the samples,” says Jiří. So they started to inquire about the healthcare waste and attempted to obtain samples for their research. They contacted nearby hospitals and started cooperation with hospitals in Pardubice and Hradec Králové. And the hospitals provided the waste for research purposes without hesitation. So Marek and Jiří started recovering the gadolinium. “We use water or other solvents to wash the vials and syringes. In the future, we will have a special washing machine to do this. We try to have as high a concentration as possible for the water we use for washing; thus, we do not need so much water,” Marek explains. Next, the solution needs to be broken down.

How the recycling works

The gadolinium-based contrast agent is an organic compound. It is usually very stable, which is why a radical decomposition method needs to be used to transform it into an inorganic substance, which is easier to work with. “Mineralisation takes place thanks to high temperature, pressure and the use of a decomposition agent, and transforms the organic compound into simpler compounds. Carbon and oxygen are transformed into carbon dioxide, hydrogen and oxygen into water or water vapour, and metals are transformed into inorganic salts,” says Marek. “This results in a solution of a gadolinium salt, specifically gadolinium(III) nitrate, which is a mineral acid. Once the solution undergoes further treatment and cleaning, it can be used as a secondary material for healthcare, for other industries or sold to companies that may use it as a source of gadolinium”. The procedure has an additional benefit. The packa-

ging left in the labs is clean. In other words, the plastics from syringes, the syringe tips or glass vials do not need to go directly to incineration. The material is taken by companies that specialise in plastics, glass or aluminium recycling. This makes the research by the Pardubice team very meaningful, not only in economic terms. And the fact that hospitals are willing to provide the waste is good news, showing that they are interested in new waste management options.

Project funding

The research further shows that the recycling method could also work with other contrast agents. And this is what is being tested by the team right now. Their advantage is that such research has not yet been carried out, not even abroad.

Recently, Marek and Jiří applied for a project related to their research. Even though it scored above the threshold, it was not recommended for funding due to a lack of funds. But the team is not giving up and is looking for other options, including establishing contacts with businesses. They also realise that the right moment may be yet to come. Importantly, their research has a sustainability dimension, which is currently a buzzword. To raise awareness, this is the second year their team has taken part in the Sustainability Week held at the University of Pardubice in the second half of September. They organised lab visits and showcased their work. “We aim to attract people both from outside and inside the university. We need to keep talking about what we do. And maybe our work will attract other Chemistry students to join us and help us finish our research project,” Jiří notes in conclusion.

“Pardubice Helped Me Breathe,”

Says Mayuka from Japan

TEXT Zaan Bester & Zuzana Paulusová • PHOTO Adrián Zeiner

She spent one semester at the University of Pardubice and managed to travel across much of Europe. Mayuka Fujiwara from Japan didn't choose the city by chance. Its great location and the fact that she wouldn't meet many fellow Japanese students caught her attention. She fell in love with svíčková with cranberries and even spiced up an alumni gathering with a musical performance. How did she enjoy her stay in Czechia, and what will be the first thing she eats when she gets home?

❗ Are Czechs and Japanese people similar in any way?

I think they share a few traits. Both tend to be a little shy and calm. They might not start a conversation right away, but once you talk to them, they're very kind and open. Czechs are also incredibly warm-hearted once you get to know them better.

❗ Why did you choose the University of Pardubice for your Erasmus stay?

I wanted to study somewhere with very few Japanese students so I could step out of my comfort zone. I was eager to meet people from different countries and cultures. A smaller city appealed to me because I believed I'd experience everyday European life more deeply than in a big city like Prague. That's why I chose Pardubice. Plus, it's a great starting point for travelling.

❗ I see you're wearing a T-shirt from Italy. Which other countries did you visit?

I went to France, Italy, Germany, Austria, and I even ended up in Slovakia by accident.

❗ By accident? So Slovakia wasn't part of the plan?

It really wasn't. During a trip to the Netherlands, my friends and I planned to continue to Belgium, but the day before our flight there was a national strike and our flight got cancelled. We tried to get back to Czechia, but all the tickets were sold out. Four of my friends managed to reach Vienna and then Prague, but I couldn't find any tickets.

❗ What did you do?

I had to go to Bratislava on my own. At first, I felt a little sad, but it turned into a wonderful adventure. I even tried some local food, and it was good!

❗ How did you like Czech food?

I loved some dishes very much. For example, svíčková – especially with cranberries! And also schnitzel, goulash, and potato salad.

❗ Was there any food you missed?

Definitely fish. In Japan, we often eat fish, even for breakfast, and here I didn't have much of it. When I get home, I'll definitely have fish right away. (laughs)

"I played The Path of the Wind on the clarinet. It's by Joe Hisaishi from the animated film My Neighbour Totoro. I chose it because the song carries nostalgia and magic. That's exactly how I feel when I think about my stay in Pardubice in Czechia. The melody fits the clarinet beautifully – it's gentle, soft, dreamy – and I love it."

❶ Did you have a favourite spot in Pardubice?

My Erasmus friends and I often went to cafés, like Café Robinson right next to campus or Lonkova Caffé. That's where I tasted the best raspberry cake and flat white I've ever had.

❷ What did you study here?

At the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, I studied methods of teaching English through music. We used songs to teach grammar and pronunciation, like filling in missing words in lyrics or focusing on linking words in fast speech, the way native speakers do.

❸ Did you teach your classmates any Japanese?

In one class, I taught Japanese through music. I picked five anime songs, and we worked with the lyrics, learned Japanese phrases and greetings, and a little about Japanese culture. At the end of the lesson, we exchanged small cards with Japanese messages, which was really sweet.

❹ You played in a wind orchestra in Japan.

Did you play regularly in Pardubice too?

I played both clarinet and saxophone. And I even had the chance to perform at a university event – an alumni gathering. I gave a small recital and really enjoyed it.

❺ Did you make friends at the university?

I met so many amazing people: friends from different countries, teachers, basically everyone I connected with here. At the farewell party, we wrote messages on T-shirts, and I have so many colourful notes from people all over the world! It's one of my favourite souvenirs.

❻ Will you miss anything when you return home?

I'll definitely miss the slower pace. Time really slowed down for me here. I had space to breathe and enjoy even ordinary moments. In Japan, everything runs like clockwork: people are always busy and rushing to the next task. Here, I could truly live in the present.



You can listen to the full interview with Mayuka from Japan and her clarinet performance in the UPCE On Air podcast.



When Your Leg Becomes a Consumable

TEXT Zuzana Paulusová • **PHOTOS** Adrián Zeiner, David Hybeš's archive

He was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Two years ago, fate pulled his leg. Literally. And since the ill-fated car accident, David Hybeš, a graduate of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Informatics, has kept three more legs in his closet. And he puts them on depending on what he has planned. With the running shoe, he is now training for a half-marathon.

It was Christmas. David Hybeš decided to join his friends for a trip to the mountains after work. They enjoyed the frosty hike to Velká Deštná. Everything went wrong when he got out of the car at home. He said goodbye to his friends and took his things out of the trunk. Then came the crash. Another car hit him from behind and pinned him against the bumper. The impact severed his left leg below the knee. His friend immediately applied pressure to the wound, saving his life. David was conscious until the ambulance arrived and remembers every moment. But the next morning was much harder. Deep despair. Questions about what would happen next... However, the then student of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Informatics did not let life take him away. David Hybeš began to fight for it. Two months in trauma care, rehabilitation, and a difficult recovery. As an athlete, his body recovered quickly. It also helped that he never once let his mind work against him. He reset it to a new mode. In addition to his family and friends, black humour was another great help. As he himself says, without it, he probably would not have been able to cope with this difficult life test. "It's mainly about the mind. The body



will eventually recover, but if you don't take care of your mental health, you may never heal," confirms David Hybeš from his own experience. Once he got through the worst of it, he managed to catch up on his schoolwork and completed his studies. Today, he works as a cybersecurity analyst and is returning to the sports world.

❗ **Do people look at you strangely because you are missing a leg?**

They do. I would even say that some of them gape. And that bothers me a lot, and I can speak up about it. These people behave as if I were different. But I'm a completely normal guy, I just don't have one of my legs.

❗ **How did it feel to stand back on both feet?**

I remember it vividly. It was amazing. I was incredibly moved. By the fact that I could do it again, that I could finally throw away my crutches and walk on my own two feet. I would compare it to the feeling when you can't move for a long time because of a sprained ankle or other injury that prevents you from walking.

❗ **Is it difficult to walk with a prosthesis?**

Pretty much. At first, I had to get used to the shifted centre of gravity, find a new balance, and learn how

to walk. Initially, I always appeared to be limping. I had to practise a lot to make my walking look natural.

❖ **Can you play sports, or are you limited in some way?**

Of course, I can play sports, but not all of them. A standard prosthesis is only suitable for certain activities. I can use it for hiking, playing soccer, or other dynamic sports. But I definitely can't do things like triathlons or skiing. I can't ride a bike yet either, because I can't get myself into the saddle.

❖ **Would you like to try any sports?**

I am attracted to skiing. I have never skied before, but that doesn't have to be a problem. The issue is the cost of a prosthesis for skiing, which is in the millions, so I will probably never be able to afford one. However, some companies that manufacture prostheses organise trial trips for amputees. I would definitely be interested in participating in that.

❖ **How much does your prosthesis cost?**

It costs around CZK 200,000 and is covered by insurance. But that's mainly because I have a healthy knee and the stump ends just below it. If I didn't have a knee, the price would go up significantly.

❖ **Does such a leg have a limited lifespan?**

Each leg is a consumable item. It needs to be replaced roughly every three to five years. It depends a lot on how active the person is. It's not like one leg will last for 20 years. The moving parts simply wear out. It's actually the same as with a car. If you don't take care of it, it won't last long either.

❖ **Can the prosthesis get stuck?**

I have a mechanical prosthesis, and that doesn't happen with it. At most, it can get stuck if debris gets into it. But that's unlikely. It's more a matter of various types of wear and tear.

❖ **Do you have more than one prosthesis at home?**

I have three in total. The walking prosthesis, which I am wearing right now. Then I have an old version, which is called the first prosthesis. That is the leg I learned to walk with. If I had to compare, the old leg is like a [Škoda] Felicia and the new one more like a Ferrari. (laughs) And then I also have a running leg.

❖ **Why running?**

Because I've been running my whole life and I want to get back to it. I started with orienteering when I was little, and when I came to Pardubice, I switched to road running. I even competed in races and ran the Pardubice half-marathon twice. But that was when I still had both my legs.

❖ **Would you like to run a half-marathon again?**

I would love to. I initially estimated that I would run it within two years of getting used to the prosthesis. Now I know that it will take longer due to complications with the stump. But I am optimistic and think I will manage it by next year.



❖ **Is this dream what drives you forward now?**

You could say that. It motivates me a lot. I even started strength training. Sport has always been my daily drive, and I'm glad that I'm gradually getting back into running. It just takes time because it's a much more complex discipline than walking.

❖ **In what way?**

Running with a prosthesis requires a more refined technique. I have to correct the fact that one leg kind of shoots forward. Theoretically, I can even run faster because the running prosthesis has a spring at the bottom that generates more energy in the leg when compressed.

❖ **How many kilometres have you run so far?**

I've already started training, but it's going slowly. So far, I've only tried short distances of around two kilometres. I'm not rushing myself.

❖ **Do you follow other disabled runners?**

I follow them on social media. It reassures me that I'm doing well and helps me a lot. But they can run up to 10 kilometres. I admire runners like that.

❖ **Would you also like to map your journey back to running?**

I want to start posting on Instagram. Firstly, so that fans can see how I exercise, train, and progress. And secondly, to raise awareness in this area. It helped me a lot in the beginning. I want to be an inspiration to those who have suffered a similar fate to mine. To let them know that life doesn't end and that it is possible. So, you can follow me too and keep your fingers crossed for me.

The Art of Perceiving Art

TEXT Zuzana Paulusová • PHOTOS Veronika Knedlíková Wanková's archive

Italy has long been intertwined with her life. Even during her studies, she was interested in the influence of Italian art on Czech art. Now, restorer Veronika Knedlíková Wanková is researching how the perception of art has changed at the University of Padua.

❶ Can everyone perceive art?

I think everyone can do it in their own way. Some people just don't know how to talk about it. They can't express exactly what they feel because it's complicated for them. However, we always experience some kind of feeling, whether negative or positive. Art can surprise us or, conversely, we may find something about it disturbing. A person's perception of a painting may also depend on their mood. When looking at a negative image – for example, a severed head – but feeling in a good mood because they just bought an ice cream, they may not find the image cruel and may perceive it as beautiful. But if they are depressed, not doing very well, and don't know what to do with their life, the same image may intensify their current state of mind and evoke negative feelings or evaluations. How we perceive our aesthetic experiences in the brain and which centres are activated during their processing is the subject of a rapidly developing field called neuroaesthetics.

❷ Can such findings be used in the creation of exhibitions?

Definitely. Today's visitors often want activities that are not too complicated. It is therefore a great advantage to know how people approach a work of art and how they perceive it. Exhibitions can capitalise on this knowledge. For example, you can work more with light, incorporate various lighting effects, or create an exhibition that primarily features round or curved elements, because we know that viewers prefer them. This approach can help people develop a relationship with art and deepen their communication with it.

Works that are just stored in a gallery and no one looks at are simply lost.

❸ Is there a big difference between how a layman and an expert perceive a work of art?

According to the latest findings in psychology, we know that there is. When an uninformed viewer approaches a work of art, they perceive it based on their feelings. It can activate memory centres, causing them to recall a specific situation that reminds them of the same feeling. This celebration in the garden is like it used to be... They recall a particular experience that makes them appreciate the painting. For people who are not burdened with knowledge of the field, emotions are easier to examine. Unlike us experts, they do not worry about it being "correct" and why a particular motif is depicted in this way when it would have looked completely different at that time.

❹ Is it harder to attract people to art today?

It's hard to compare. In the past, a single painting in a church was a rarity. The world was visually cleaner. Today, we are inundated with images of all kinds, and our brains process one image after another very quickly. It is more challenging to capture people's attention. When an exhibition opens, attendance is often perceived as a sign of a certain social status, so I attend because everyone else is, and I want to show that I am also educated. Then there is the group that is genuinely interested in art, but it is not that large. And then, there are the rest of the potential visitors who are not interested in art, and we need to work with them and try to appeal to their interests.

❗ So how does one find their way to art?

Probably by visiting galleries and museums. It is essential to focus on children from an early age and provide them with opportunities to engage with art. Various creative programmes, workshops, and art-focused summer camps are important. It is essential to realise that you don't need to be an expert, but you do need to have a relationship with art and understand why it is important to you. Researchers at the University of Rome, studying the influence of art on emotions, concluded that after visiting a gallery, a family's overall emotional state improved, and everyone was immediately in a better mood. Other studies also show that art is vital for a person's mental well-being. Therefore, its greater connection with therapeutic centres or involvement in the study of depression is being considered. The connection between art and the study of the human psyche, therefore, has greater potential than we can currently foresee.

❗ Can art appeal to me even as an adult?

It definitely can. It is important not to be afraid of art and to try visiting different types of exhibitions. There are events such as the Venice Biennale, where everyone can find something that interests them. Various installations are very popular, even in outdoor spaces. Street art is a highly effective strategy for attracting young people to the arts. In Padua, there is a map of

imaginative murals, i.e., large-scale paintings on walls in public spaces, where you can take photos and share them. Contemporary art gives us freedom, which should make it attractive to us.

❗ What was the last exhibition you went to?

I was in Venice at an exhibition on the depiction of the human body in the 16th century, so there were drawings by Leonardo da Vinci, for example. I really enjoy attending exhibitions, but it's very time-consuming for me, as I would always prefer to visit each one twice. First, I examine the works themselves, and then, the second time, I read the accompanying texts or use an audio guide. I struggle to focus on the artwork and absorb additional information at the same time.

❗ What are you doing in Italy?

I have my own research project there. Because of it, I got a position at the University of Padua, which is nothing short of a miracle. (laughs) The Italian university environment is highly competitive, and there are limited opportunities for young researchers, making it challenging to secure a place.

❗ What is your project about?

I've always been interested in the Italian influences on Czech art, especially at the end of the 16th century, which hasn't been studied extensively. Works created in the Czech lands were considered of lesser quality





and therefore uninteresting, while the Italians who came to the country significantly elevated the local culture. I realised that even if the painting was not of high quality, it still hung somewhere in a remote village church and was probably of great importance to the locals. And so, I came up with the idea of researching how people actually perceive a work of art and what value it has for them. I then developed this idea into my project and approached a professor at the University of Padua who specialises in the psychology of art perception. I asked him if he would be my supervisor, and he agreed. My project ultimately received funding.

☛ Is that why you're now working at the psychology department?

With the project approved, I secured a great job as an assistant professor there. I have three years to work on my project, titled 'A Miracle: From Mind to Canvas and Back.' I'm really looking forward to it.

☛ Does your favourite Italian-Czech artistic thread come into play in the project?

Yes, it's research into intercultural communication. Artists from the Czech lands travelled to Italy in the 16th century, stayed there, studied, and then returned with the knowledge they had acquired. I'm interested in how their travels transformed art and how they were reflected in the perception of "ordinary" people, what they appreciated in the paintings. I'm looking for records of these feelings in the archives. They may have mentioned that it was a beautiful painting they saw somewhere on their travels, that it seemed very vivid to them, or that it reminded them of something – these are precisely the valuable impressions that art brings to people. And so are the various emotions it evokes in them.

☛ Are you also interested in the views of people today?

As part of the psychological component of the project, we are developing a specialised questionnaire that will assess whether and how paintings affect us today and what emotions they evoke in us. We are interested, for example, in whether we appreciate realistic scenes more, or, on the contrary, if the scenes are rather emotional, even expressive ones, and whether we can describe them. The questionnaire will be administered to people in both Italy and the Czech Republic. We also want to find out whether the Czechs prefer art in the Czech Republic and the Italians in Italy. We assume that thanks to today's interconnectedness of cultures, we will no longer see this difference between countries. On the contrary, we may find out whether we react more positively to expressive scenes, for example, because they have a strong effect on us and evoke clear emotions.

☛ How did you end up in Italy?

I have to blame my husband for that. Almost seven years ago, he wanted to continue his scientific career with a postdoctoral fellowship, so he looked for a suitable place and discovered Padua. I didn't know the city very well, unlike Venice or Florence, where I had spent some time during my master's studies. That's how I learned Italian. So, I immediately agreed to the move. We had a six-month-old son, with whom I was on maternity leave, and the opportunity to live in my favourite country, Italy, presented itself, so there was no reason to hesitate. Moreover, shortly after arriving in Italy, I had an unexpected job offer.

☛ Tell us about this interesting offer?

Shortly after moving, a colleague from the Faculty of Restoration contacted me. She had been awarded a research project on Renaissance stucco. She asked



me if I would like to get involved, as I had been working on the stucco decoration at Bučovice Castle, which even resulted in a publication called 'Perla Moravy' ('Pearl of Moravia'). So, I was very tempted to continue working on this topic.

🕒 **From Italy?**

Yes, it was about deepening my knowledge from my previous research. So, working remotely didn't bother me at all. I didn't have to physically be in Bučovice, as I had already done that in the past. (laughs) The faculty was in no hurry for the results, and it was up to me to decide if and how I could juggle everything. Of course, I took it as a challenge, so I went for it.

🕒 **And you could stay in the field even during maternity leave, and even in Italy...**

Yes, I realised that I couldn't just stay at home with my son, that I had to do something "of my own". I got a small job at the National Gallery in Prague and did restoration work at home. Maintaining a genuine connection with works of art remains very important to me today.

🕒 **Who supplied you with works of art at that time?**

One art collector had me restore a large part of the estate of the painter Anna Zemánková. She was an artist who ranks among the world's most renowned creators, and her work has been exhibited in Venice, New York, Paris, and other locations. The paintings, created on paper, depict various floral compositions, often rendered in embroidery or relief. The artist liked to use a combination of different techniques and materials. This diversity suited me perfectly when restoring her works.

🕒 **Do you still do restoration work?**

I have less time for restoration now, which I regret. Since I restore items at home, I'm limited to working on simpler projects. In any case, I would like to revisit it in the future. I enjoy challenges and appreciate

the entire restoration process, particularly the opportunity to keep the work in good condition. Moreover, I am delighted when someone else enjoys my work.

🕒 **How do you like living in Padua?**

Padua is a great place to live. It's very green, has good public transportation, and is home to a university, making it quite lively. It's more authentic, and you can really experience typical Italian life here. It's a city that doesn't primarily live off tourism, and you can really tell. There are no crowds of tourists, and even a regular coffee costs a normal price. Of course, everyone who comes to visit us must see Venice. Nothing can compare to it.

🕒 **Is there anything that surprised you in Italy?**

How strictly the siesta is observed here. It starts around 1:30 p.m. and ends at 4:00 p.m. Fortunately, it's not an issue at work, unlike at home, where we live. There, you're supposed to be really quiet, ideally resting, and definitely not doing any noisy household chores, such as vacuuming. According to our Italian neighbours, you're not supposed to do anything at all during this time.

🕒 **Are you planning to return home?**

Our plan has always been to return. We originally planned to spend two years in Italy, but we've been here for six years now and have another three years ahead of us. It's hard to say if we'll want to move, because our older son has started school here. But we visit the Czech Republic quite regularly. This autumn, I will be giving a lecture at the Faculty of Restoration. I believe it's very important for today's students to be in regular contact with art, to understand it from different perspectives, and to be aware of the process that accompanies its creation. Plus, it's beneficial to hear someone else discuss it. Passing on knowledge and ideas makes a great deal of sense to me.

SKILL SET:

Building Drones, Custom Microscopes, and Writing 70-Page Assignments

TEXT Zuzana Paulusová • PHOTOS Adrián Zeiner

While his classmates were busy preparing for prom, he was busy programming a robot for an international competition. He later had to cut nearly a third of his thesis because it was “too long”. And when his younger brother needed equipment for his science projects, he simply built him a custom microscope. When Jakub Ešpandr from the Faculty of Economics and Administration takes on a project, he refuses to settle for “good enough”.

A pair of FEA students recently created a 3D haptic model of the Mydlářovský House in Chrudim – home to the Museum of Puppet Culture. The 1:55 model is now part of the museum’s tactile exhibition, allowing visitors with visual impairments to explore the building through touch. Jakub and his classmate Martin Fiebinger divided the work: Martin handled the design, while Jakub took charge of the 3D printing. And printing is something Jakub knows well: he routinely prints components for his robots, drones, cameras and even microscopes.

“Printing the house and all its ornaments took over 200 hours. The post-processing took another hundred – gluing the model together, sanding the joints so they wouldn’t show, and applying the final paintwork. At that point I had no idea what ‘haptic’ even meant, but my gut told me to use a more durable paint. When I later learned the model was meant to be touched, I was relieved I’d chosen a paint used for German military vehicles – it can withstand almost anything,” Jakub laughs.

🔍 What’s that case you’re carrying?

I keep my drone in it. I used to transport it on the back seat of my car, and... well, one day it fell over and got damaged. So I built a case. It started as a regular transport box, but I modified it based on my own design. Some parts I printed on a 3D printer – simply because you can’t buy them anywhere. The result fits my needs exactly, so I’m happy with it.

🔍 Do you carry it around often?

Only when I’m in the mood to fly, or when I want to film or take photos. Recently I even brought a couple of drones to university and showed them to my thesis supervisor and several lecturers, because my thesis focuses directly on drone-based remote sensing.

🔍 When and where did you last fly your drone?

That was still in Taiwan – I came back from my internship there in mid-June. I spent four and a half months there, but only managed to go on three trips. I tried to use the time mainly for my own development. And after returning home, I barely had time to fly here too – my thesis kept me fully occupied until



I defended it at the end of August. I complicated things a bit by including seven case studies comparing 60 models.

❗ Isn't that more like a dissertation?

Theoretically, maybe yes. Some parts genuinely look like a PhD thesis. That's kind of my reputation at the faculty. (laughs) If a seminar paper was supposed to be eight to ten pages, mine had 70. My classmates don't even bat an eye anymore.

❗ Do you fly any special type of drone?

My favourites are the ones I build myself. This one too. I hardly use anything else nowadays. I have specific requirements, and the only drones that meet them are the ones I make. (laughs)

❗ How are your drones different from the standard ones on the market?

Commercial drones are made as universal machines for a mass audience. Mine aren't. Each of my drones is custom-built for a specific purpose. I can push the performance further and fine-tune the parameters exactly as I need – speed, stability, payload capacity for cameras or custom sensors. As a result, they can do things you simply won't get from regular store-bought models.

❗ When did you build your very first drone?

Drones became popular in the Czech Republic around 2013, when the first communities started forming. I built my first one in 2012. I ordered the components from the Netherlands and China and made the frame out of wood. By then I already had experience with robotics, electrical engineering and electronics. I originally started by building and programming robots for competitions – first using specialised LEGO Technic kits, and when even those weren't enough, I printed my own components on a 3D printer.

❗ So how do you actually build a drone?

First, I design the frame in CAD [Computer-Aided Design] and run simulations of the expected flight parameters – that helps me choose the right electronic and motor components. Then I print a prototype on a 3D printer to verify the tolerances. The final frame is cut from carbon fibre on my CNC [Computer Numerical Control] machine. Then comes the assembly, wiring, soldering of electronic parts, and finally the software tuning. For that, I use my own software that analyses the drone's flight-log data – its "black box". After many hours of fine-tuning, the drone is

finally ready to fly. Besides standard cameras, I also mount custom equipment – I even built my own multispectral camera for academic research. It's still a work in progress and needs plenty more tweaking.

❶ Do you build drones on commission?

I do. I created a brand – Born4Flight. It's a small startup I'd like to develop further. The idea is to offer complete design, development and production of custom FPV [First Person View] drones – both for individuals who want a unique machine and for companies or media teams that need specialised equipment for filming, surveying or other projects.

❷ And what do you personally film with your drones?

I love bird's-eye views. They're the only way to get truly original shots. But what I enjoy most is experimental photography – macro and micro photography. You can really experiment with it and develop a distinctive style that people immediately recognise. It's not something everyone does – you need specific knowledge, experience and specialised gear. And now I'm also getting different requests: recently I filmed the junior motocross championship, for example.

❸ When did you actually start taking photos?

I first held a camera when I was three or four – and immediately took it apart. (laughs) I've been into photography since primary school. I loved capturing little moments and documenting trips. In secondary school, I bought my own camera and joined the photography club. I even represented the school in a photo competition with my macro shots of animals, architecture and various experimental images.

❹ Have you ever won any awards for your photos?

Yes, quite a few. I repeatedly placed in FotografRoku, a competition organised by FotoVideo magazine, and some of my photos even made it into the print edition. In 2017, I won first place in the Technology Around Me competition run by the Prague Science & Technology Society for a short documentary film. One of my photos was also selected by SAAL Digital for large-format printing as part of a photo contest. That really gave me a boost – that moment when recognition starts coming in.

❺ What does your photography gear look like?

It depends on where I'm going. While most people try to make their equipment lighter and smaller, I carry a photo backpack that weighs around twenty kilos. I take the gear I trust: Canon professional DSLRs paired with several lenses, from wide-angle to telephoto. I know I can rely on them: battery life,

shutter durability, and overall performance. And they handle dust, rain and rough terrain without any issues. And if something does break? I fix it myself. I've repaired faulty lenses at home several times.

❻ Do you repair cameras for others too?

Yes. Friends know they can always come to me – and word has spread. Recently, a film production company from Slovakia contacted me because they had damaged a specialised €4,500 camera and couldn't find anyone who would repair it for a reasonable price.

❼ And do you specialise in anything else?

Thanks to my younger brother, who has been into biology since primary school, I started getting deeper into microscopes. The ones we had at home didn't always meet our needs, so I began experimenting –

modifying them, upgrading them, adding new components. I added options for microphotography and various lighting techniques. It helped him enormously with his biology studies and sample documentation.

❽ So that's what pulled you into optics?

Exactly – microscopes and optical instruments in general. Over time we started buying older models, watching auctions and hunting for parts across the globe. We received

parcels from Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Australia, the US... eventually we built an entire collection. And yes – I can fully refurbish them. I disassemble the entire microscope, clean the optics, repair or replace faulty parts, then reassemble and realign everything. That can get complicated, especially with models from the 1940s or 1960s.

❾ Why is that?

Because documentation for those models is nearly impossible to find today. I even wrote directly to the manufacturer – and they replied that back then, only three specialists in the world knew how to service the instrument. Their advice? Trial and error.

❿ And you managed...

I did – and it didn't even take that long. That's when I decided to create missing manuals for older microscopes. I keep a catalogue of all my microscopes online, complete with photos and descriptions – a kind of virtual museum. By now, I have one of the largest personal collections of manuals and publications on microscopes.

⓫ It sounds like you approach everything your own way.

That's probably true. I tend to do things differently, in my own style. It was the same in secondary school. When I built a robot that won the Czech round of a competition, I was already working on another

"Each of my drones is custom-built for a specific purpose. I can push the performance further and fine-tune the parameters exactly as I need."

robot I was supposed to take to the world finals. I programmed it using Arduino – and ironically, I was failing that subject in school. (laughs) In competitions, it often happened that I taught my robots far more tasks than required, or described their programming in an overly sophisticated way. My challenge is that I find it hard to do something “just simply” when I know it could go much further. It feels wasteful to stay on the surface.

📍 Where are you heading now?

I always try to find a niche and significantly improve it, even if the result will serve only a small group of people. I enjoy pushing things forward. My dream is to design and build my own products, or create tools that people can genuinely use to develop their own skills. For example, my fully automated photography system: it consists of three components I designed and built myself – a macro rail, a micro rail and a control unit. All the user does is enter the starting

and ending positions and choose the step size or number of shots. The system takes over and produces a sequence of perfectly sharp images. I’m also focusing on drone software because I want complete independence from third-party apps – so I’m developing my own tools with features I always wished commercial apps had.

📍 You build robots, drones, repair optics and microscopes. What’s next?

Hard to say. I’ve just applied for the doctoral programme in Applied Informatics, so I’m curious to see what challenges await me. I’m specialising in a few areas, but I still aim to remain versatile. Right now, I’m investing above all in personal growth. I think that’s the best thing I can do – build the broadest portfolio of skills possible. Because what you develop while you’re young is exactly what you can draw on for the rest of your life.



Supervision is a Tool – You Just Need to Use it Right

TEXT Zuzana Paulusová • **PHOTO** Pavla Ribárová • **ILLUSTRATION** Veronika Beňová

It may sound like something lifted from a corporate handbook, yet supervision is an exceptionally practical tool. It can help resolve workplace conflict, support mental wellbeing, and even prevent burnout. Adéla Michková from the Faculty of Health Studies has been working with it for twenty years. She has probably asked the most common question – “What do you need right now?” – well over a hundred times. But what is it like when work becomes a genuine dialogue?

The room is quiet. The calm is broken only by the rustle of paper, the sound of a water bottle opening, or someone rummaging in a backpack. Twelve students from the Faculty of Health Studies sit in a circle – future nurses, midwives and health-social care workers. They have just completed their compulsory clinical placements: some in long-term care, others in surgery, others still in residential homes for older adults. “I don’t really know where to start,” one young student says hesitantly. The supervisor doesn’t rush her; she simply nods and leaves space. Little by little, the student begins to open up – speaking about being shaken by patients’ helplessness, about the difficulty of maintaining healthy boundaries without losing her sense of humanity.

“At our paediatric gynaecology clinic, a mother came in with her little girl. They’d been sent to us for an examination because of suspected abuse,” another student shares – a memory from her placement that has stayed with her. A third adds his perspective: he was particularly struck by how differently staff communicated – sometimes warm and welcoming, other times distant and curt. “I occasionally felt like I was more of a nuisance than any-

thing else,” he admits with a hint of disappointment. The group listens. No judgement. Gradually, the session becomes a space for sharing, support and reflection. The supervisor lets the students speak first – to articulate what is weighing on them. Only then does she step in: “Thank you for sharing. I know that wasn’t easy. What do you need now?”

Together they revisit the situations described, unpacking how the students felt at the time and what was happening internally. The supervisor helps them see the events from different angles: “How did the staff respond? Did their behaviour affect you? Were you able to react in the moment?”

She encourages deeper reflection so the students can find their own answers – and identify what might help them handle similar situations better in future. “How has this shaped you? Where has it moved you?” she continues, helping them process the experience and move forward. The group talks about how their placements have reshaped their understanding of the profession. Some speak about frustration; others about unexpected moments of humanity. Supervision is not merely a retrospective glance – it is a space where new understanding begins to form.

I'm Here for You

Students at the Faculty of Health Studies take part in these sessions once a semester – this is group supervision. Those who wish can also attend individual sessions. In both cases, they bring real situations from their placements.

Adéla Michková and four other supervisors are there to support them. Her “specialty” is supervision in helping professions. Her aim is to teach students how to use this tool well – to help them grow, gain confidence and establish themselves professionally at the very start of their careers.

❗ How many conversations have you led this way?
Honestly? I stopped counting years ago. It's in the hundreds. But the number isn't what matters – it's what happens in those conversations. Each session is different, each dialogue has its own depth. Every student, every professional brings something unique. I'm here so that an ordinary conversation can become a shift in perspective.

❗ What do people tend to imagine when they hear the word “supervision”?

Many are nervous – they think I'm going to scrutinise their work, judge them or criticise them. That I'll see what they do “in their own way” – and perhaps not entirely correctly from a professional standpoint. Others know exactly what supervision is and come prepared.

❗ And what comes to your mind?

Support. Help. Sharing. The word itself may sound

technical, but in reality it represents a space of trust, safety, reflection – and above all, humanity.

❗ How would you describe supervision?

To me, supervision is a practical tool. And like any tool, it only works when used appropriately – you wouldn't use a shovel to rake leaves or a hammer to tighten a screw. It's the same with supervision: you need to choose the right type for the situation, and you also need to know when to set it aside once it stops being useful. Both tools and supervision share a common purpose – to be helpful. That is the core of my work.

❗ Is supervision just a recent trend?

Not exactly, though it is far more visible today. It used to be the preserve of therapists and social workers. Now it's sought out by healthcare professionals, teachers – even students. It's a trend, yes, but also a necessity. The pressures of practice, the expectations, and the emotions we carry all require a safe space.

❗ Where did supervision originate?

It dates back roughly 120 years. It emerged in the United States in the early days of social work, when volunteers – usually middle-class women – began helping families in poor neighbourhoods. A “supervisor” guided and supported them. The Czech context is a bit specific: for decades we supposedly “had no social problems”, so supervision developed mainly within psychotherapy – and even then, largely underground.

❗ Does the Czech approach differ from Western practice?

Here, a supervisor is seen as an external, supportive

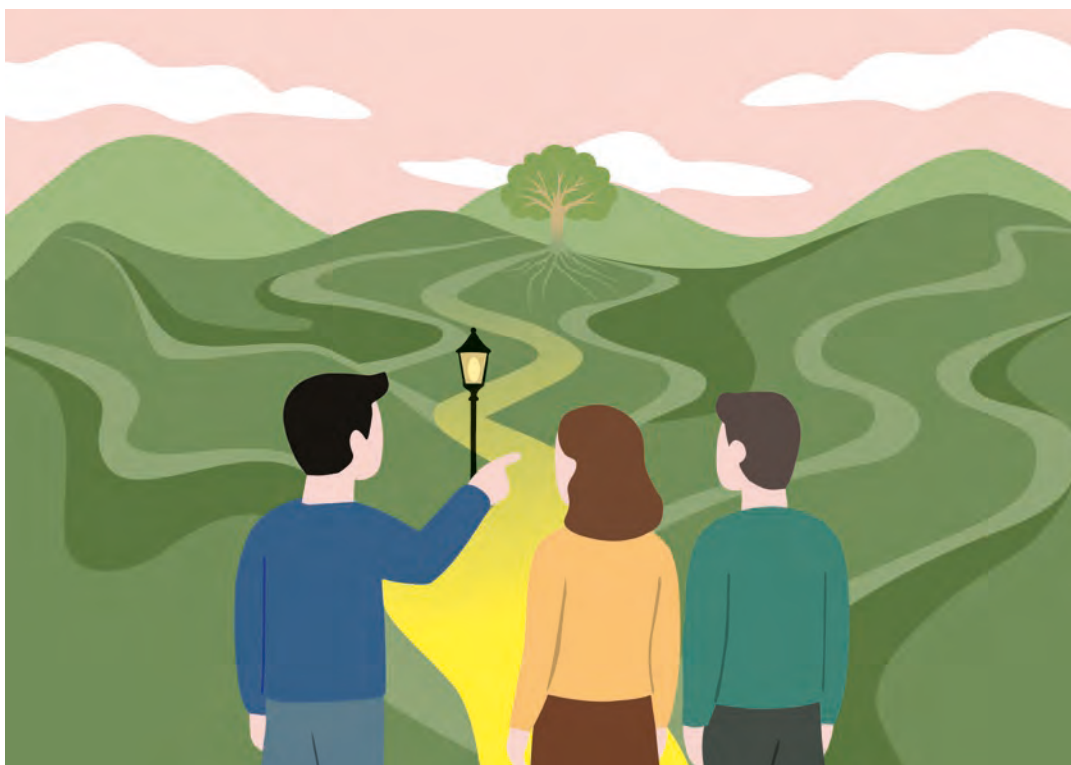


figure. In many Western organisations, the supervisor is an internal staff member who also has a formal oversight role. That model doesn't work particularly well here.

❶ Why not?

Because we have a complicated relationship with the idea of control. Any kind of oversight tends to make people uneasy – they immediately assume something is wrong. That's why some people initially respond to me with resistance. But I'm not there to inspect anything. I come as support. Together we look at why workplace communication may be breaking down – and what that leads to.

❷ How do you work within a supervised team?

I act as their "external eyes". I help them look at their work differently – in the broader context of the issue at hand. I often remind them that everyone has an "inner warning light". When it starts flashing, it usually means: "Something isn't right – perhaps you're making things harder for yourself, or this attitude is blocking cooperation."

But I never interrogate anyone. My work is grounded

in core communication principles: transparency, clarity, confidentiality and clear boundaries. And I try to be as respectful as possible.

❸ Is willingness essential?

Absolutely. Above all, the willingness to reflect on one's work – even to question it – to collaborate and move forward. Self-reflection is crucial. If a supervisee lacks that, they usually refuse to work with me.

❹ Who comes to you most often?

Sometimes it's management, seeking supervision for their team or for themselves. Sometimes it's frontline staff. Their work is demanding, and the only real way to prevent burnout or premature exit from the profession is to care for mental wellbeing within the workplace itself.

❺ How does the cooperation typically begin?

I always start by introducing myself and what I do. Then I say: "Supervision is here for you – it should serve you." And then I ask, simply and directly: What do you need right now? What part of your work would you like to look at? What would you like to talk about? How can I help you?



❗ And how do people usually respond?

Often with: “We’re having communication problems. We struggle to agree on things. Cooperation is poor. Situations escalate into conflict, the tension is constant.” Teams often want to improve communication and strengthen collaboration. Others face aggression from clients, overload, uncertainty. Many are troubled by ethical dilemmas, loss of empathy or sheer exhaustion.

❗ Who was the last group you worked with?

A team of healthcare workers in a residential facility. They were concerned about the quality of care and a growing disconnect between the nursing team and the care staff – especially in how each group viewed the needs of clients. For example, the nurses instructed the care staff to ensure hydration for a patient with a permanent catheter – but the care staff didn’t follow through at all. The team wanted to explore how to address such situations.

❗ What did you advise them?

It’s not my job to give advice. I can offer information, a different angle, or examples from elsewhere – but they decide what is useful for them. We looked at responsibility – ethical and legal – at the competences of the different roles, and at ways of intervening, including what it means to “step out of line” in order to advocate for a client.

❗ How do you continue working with such a team?

It depends on the group, their topic, and their goals. Each situation needs a different method. Sometimes it’s useful to keep everyone together and facilitate discussion. Sometimes it’s better to split into smaller groups. One particularly valuable method is the reflecting team: I talk with one member while the others listen. Afterwards, they reflect on what came to mind

while listening – offering fresh perspectives. Sometimes we use cards or images; sometimes we draw diagrams or maps.

❗ Does it happen that someone resists your work?

Yes – usually it’s the person who feels threatened by the external viewpoint. Sometimes their attitude softens over time; sometimes it doesn’t. If resistance dominates, then my presence is no longer useful – and it’s better to end the cooperation.

❗ Why is supervision so important?

Because it heightens our sensitivity – towards our own needs, the needs of others, the needs of the organisation and the larger system. It guides us to reflect on why things are as they are, whether the situation works for us, what role we play in it, and what we might be able to do differently.

❗ Are there any general tips for functioning well in a team?

Every team is made up of different personalities. You don’t have to get on with everyone personally, but professionally it’s essential to respect their role and experience. Listen – really listen – to what others are saying. When you’re unsure, ask. In healthcare especially, it’s better to ask twice than make a harmful mistake. Remember that feedback is not criticism – it’s how we learn from each other and about ourselves. Your emotions matter. If something affects you, it’s absolutely fine to talk about it. Teamwork isn’t just about what you do – but how you do it. Small gestures – offering help, saying thank you, showing respect – have a huge impact. They help create a healthy working environment.

Mgr. Adéla Michková, Ph.D.

Adéla Michková is a lecturer and Head of the Health-Social Work Unit at the Department of Midwifery and Health-Social Work, and a supervisor at the Centre for Health Care, Faculty of Health Studies, University of Pardubice. She has worked with supervision for twenty years – both in practice, as a supervisor in social services, and in research. Considers supervision of students’ professional placements to be a vital tool in preparing not only social workers but a wide range of helping professionals, and she is actively involved in integrating supervision into degree programmes. She is a member of the Association of Supervisors in Helping Professions.

Off to Ethiopia for Czech Beer

TEXT Zuzana Paulusová • PHOTOS Lukáš Horník's archive

Milk or beer? As a true Czech, Lukáš Horník would naturally go for beer. Yet his work actually revolves around both drinks. Milk regularly takes him to Klatovy; beer, on the other hand, once took him all the way to Ethiopia. Where will he end up next? Hard to say. With a degree from the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Informatics, his expertise in process control and automation can take him just about anywhere.

❶ **So, what kind of beer do they have in Ethiopia?**

I mostly drank Harar Beer, which was actually the reason I went there. You can get other brands too, even though industrial beer production in the country has a relatively short history.

❷ **Did you like it?**

It was a bit sweeter than what we're used to back home, but still quite similar to well-known Czech brands – maybe even better in some cases. The sweeter taste comes from a slightly different recipe: corn grits are added to the malt mash, partly replacing the malt. It makes production cheaper and gives the beer a smoother, slightly sweet finish.

❸ **How come it tastes so similar to Czech beer?**

It's because Czechoslovak engineers helped build the Harar Brewery – and another one in Bedele – back in the 1980s. You can still see it in the technology they use. They even stick to Czech brewing recipes, so the taste isn't dramatically different.

❹ **Do Ethiopians drink a lot of beer?**

They certainly enjoy it, but it's considered a luxury, so it's mostly for the middle and upper classes. Lower-income groups tend to prefer chewing khat leaves – known locally as chat – which have a mild amphetamine-like effect. You can find sellers on almost every corner.

❺ **What does the Harar Brewery look like?**

It's actually one of the landmarks of this Muslim city. The brewery sits on a hill about 1,950 metres above sea level, surrounded by beautiful mountain scenery.

Despite the setting, it's a modern facility – spotless, and the copper brewhouse covers shine just like the ones we have back home.

❻ **And what exactly did you go there to do?**

I was commissioning a condensate recovery system – essentially an energy-saving setup that makes use of residual steam. All the steam condensate from the brewery's systems is collected in one tank, above which there's a heat exchanger that preheats the process water.

❼ **How was the cooperation with the local team?**

I worked with two electricians who handled all my wiring and testing requests without any trouble. The only thing that surprised me was their different approach to installation: in Ethiopia, they focus mainly on making sure everything works. The aesthetic side of the job doesn't seem to matter as much. (laughs)

❽ **Do you travel to Africa often?**

This was actually my first time, but our company is regularly involved in projects there. We also look after the technology in the Bedele Brewery. I was supposed to go to Harar once before, but a positive COVID test grounded me at the last minute. So this trip was really eye-opening – it made me realise how well we live in Europe. I started appreciating little things like running hot water... or running water at all.

❾ **Despite all that, did the country leave a good impression on you?**

It did – even though getting there was quite an adventure. First my train was cancelled, then I missed my connecting flight in Addis Ababa, and when I finally

reached Dire Dawa, my suitcase didn't. Still, Ethiopia is a fascinating place – a completely different world, full of historical sites and natural beauty. And the local food is absolutely delicious.

❶ What's the city of Harar like?

The old town of Harar is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its narrow streets and small houses actually reminded me a bit of Greece. We visited several museums dedicated to Harari culture and even went to see the local ghetto. Throughout the walk, a group of children followed us around, acting as our guides. At first, they were asking for biscuits and sweets, but before long they started chanting, "Money, money, money!"

❷ Did you experience anything out of the ordinary while you were there?

Absolutely – one of the most unforgettable moments was an evening spent among hyenas. We were feeding them chunks of meat on the end of a stick. It was breathtaking to see how, thanks to a man who knew how to communicate with them, these wild animals seemed completely tame. For a moment, you felt as if they couldn't possibly harm you.

❸ You've also been working in Klatovy recently. What brings you there?

The local dairy. It's controlled by one of the last remaining DASOR systems – the only other one I know of is at the Temelín nuclear power plant. We're now replacing this old control system because it's very difficult to maintain and reprogramme. It's quite a challenge, especially since all the work has to be done while the dairy is running. The cows, after all, don't stop giving milk! (laughs)

❹ What exactly does the system at the dairy control?

It's a large and complex process. Our systems cover the entire technological chain: from milk intake from tankers through pasteurisation and separation to the final production of dairy products. A key part of it is the central cleaning station, which sanitises all the pipes and equipment that come into contact with pasteurised milk. This significantly reduces the risk of contamination and keeps the production process highly hygienic.

❺ Where else might your work take you?

Honestly, almost anywhere. We're able to deliver projects all over the world, especially where our expertise in process automation is useful: dairies, sugar refineries or breweries. We also take part in some very specific projects, such as refurbishing observatories abroad. Another of our specialisations is the so-called Plasmatron – a plasma torch used for thermal spraying of metals like tungsten. We even installed one in Japan.

❻ Would you say your job has fulfilled your childhood dream?

Absolutely. I wanted to be an electrician from the very beginning, and when I once stuck a nail into a socket as a kid, that desire only grew stronger! (laughs) Later, I worked part-time as an electrician at a company in Chrudim, where electrical designers would give us our tasks and run the entire projects. That fascinated me, and from then on, I knew I wanted to become one of them. I really love my job. It's engaging, varied and never routine – and routine honestly terrifies me.

❼ Did you have any trouble finding a job after graduation?

None at all. Right after my final exams, one of my current colleagues basically "snapped me up". I still get job offers on LinkedIn all the time. This field is in such high demand that it's definitely worth studying.

❽ And what advice would you give to current students of your faculty?

Don't focus solely on your own field. Try to see how your knowledge connects to other disciplines and make use of those links. Collaboration with classmates is always valuable – and it's even better to get involved with companies during your studies. That's how truly interesting theses are created.



Youth Elects Youth.

“It’s amazing,”

Says Anežka Nedomová, a Newly Elected Deputy

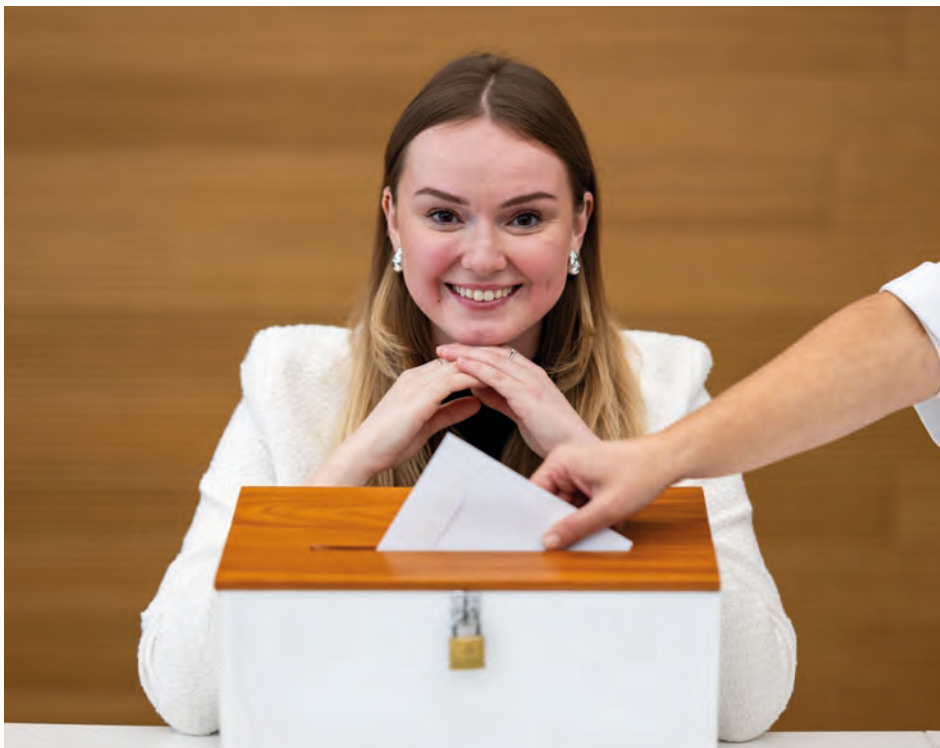
TEXT Zuzana Paulusová • PHOTOS Adrián Zeiner

Anežka is 24 years old and recently became one of the youngest deputies in the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. Thanks to preferential votes from young people, as well as many women, Anežka, who is a graduate of the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy and is continuing her studies elsewhere, got a seat in the Czech Chamber of Deputies. What are her objectives? To open a debate on cryptocurrencies and introduce stricter penalties for domestic violence.

At the beginning of November, Anežka attended her first official post-election meeting of the Chamber of Deputies. Now she already knows her way around the Parliament buildings in Prague’s Lesser Town. Before the elections, getting elected seemed like a distant dream. She was the fifth-listed candidate on the STAN movement’s ballot, with many better-known and more experienced candidates listed above her. Despite such a position, Anežka, who majored in German Language at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy of the University of Pardubice, stepped up to the challenge – and achieved a sort of election miracle, as she left her four higher-listed colleagues behind. Thanks to more than 3,000 preferential votes, she was elected as number one. When her colleagues congratulated her at the party’s venue for election night at Pernštýnské Square in Pardubice, she had not realised it all yet. On Monday, she saw her face in the newspaper and knew that it was a fact.

Calls that worked

Anežka believes she was successful thanks to calls to vote for 30 candidates below the age of 30 and a call to give preferential votes to 3 candidates below the age of 30, which made her more visible. “My photo was on a billboard in the Pardubice Region. When I was passing by in a car, it felt unbelievable,” says Anežka. The calls aimed to encourage voters to support young candidates below the age of 30 and make the Chamber of Deputies younger. The average age of deputies before the elections was 53, the second highest average in history. What also helped was that young people, as shown by Ipsos surveys, feel underrepresented in politics and want parties to better address their needs and issues such as affordable housing, mental health, innovations in the education system, or tougher punishments for sexual offenders. The campaign called “Circle Women” worked in a similar way and supported greater engagement of women from left to right. Her social



media presence, especially on Instagram, also helped her catch the attention of young people and win their votes. This is consistent with the increasing tendency to mobilise young voters in the digital space.

Twelve young newcomers

In the end, there are 12 deputies in their twenties and a record-high number of female deputies. This is an enormous increase compared to the previous elections, when only three young politicians won a seat. "It is great that young voters are finally heard. It is a clear signal that they want more young deputies as well as a shift in direction. It is a new phenomenon – and really amazing, in my opinion," says Anežka, who continues to study German Language and Literature in Brno after graduating in Pardubice. "I still have one more year of study ahead, but I will give priority to my work in Parliament," she says decisively. She sees the new job as a challenge and looks forward to it very much. "Hello, my name is Anežka Nedomová and I will be your representative in the Chamber of Deputies in the following four years," Anežka introduces herself with great enthusiasm.

❗ Do you remember the moment when you learned that you had been elected?

I must admit that it is rather blurry for me. (laughs). I am realistic and pragmatic, so I did not think for a moment that I could jump ahead as a fifth-listed candidate and get ahead of all the experienced co-

lleagues on our ballot, including the lead candidate for the Pardubice Region. When the results started to look promising for me, I called my best friend and asked her to come immediately and join me. When she arrived, I got overwhelmed by all the emotions and intense feelings of the past days, and I broke down. But my friend kept encouraging me and told me what a success it was.

❗ What were your feelings over the election weekend?

Friday was quite normal, but from Saturday morning, people kept sending me messages: that they were keeping their fingers crossed for me, that they supported me, that they hoped I would get elected. I also got photos from the ballot rooms. Suddenly, I was tagged on Instagram much more often, and I kept getting new followers. My posts suddenly had 60,000 and later even 100,000 views. "Mum, come here now. There is something going on, this is crazy," I kept telling my mother. (laughs) I had some 260 followers before the elections, which is not a crowd that gets you to Parliament. It is far from 3,176 preferential votes...

❗ Do you know who voted for you?

I was supported mostly by young people and women. I did not need to carry out any special investigation after the elections, as the messages I got clearly showed this. About 80% of them were sent by women. And it is really lovely when women support women. We live in a patriarchal world: a man joins another man and they go have a cigar, and while doing so, they discuss what they need. And they tell us women to stay in

the kitchen and get them coffee. But they do not want us to interfere. That's not to be harsh about men; they also supported me. They told me to "give the others a thrashing."

❶ Why did you decide to run?

I want to live in a democratic country with the rule of law. Thanks to democracy, we can have the interview we are having. Thanks to democracy, we could elect young people as our deputies, and we can show everyone what people can do. I can draw comparisons since I lived abroad in the past; I spent a year in Germany thanks to the University of Pardubice, and also in other European countries. Having said that, I am back in the Czech Republic and I want to build a strong foundation for younger generations. It is a sort of mission for me.

❷ Do you get support from your family?

I do, and I appreciate that. My family has supported me from the very beginning. However, I heard a lot of "buts" after the elections. But you will finish school, right? But you will not give up now? But education is important...

❸ When did you become interested in politics?

It was when I was 14 or 15 that I started to understand what was going on in Czech politics. And it was not a rosy story. I was in the final year of primary school, and we started to discuss politics with my classmates. Then each of us went to a different grammar school, but we still kept in touch, and together we took part in a number of protests; they made me aware of the movement called Million Moments for Democracy, and I quickly understood that democracy is something that needs to be cherished and fought for.

❹ Did you talk politics at home?

Regularly. It was mostly thanks to my grandpa, who made politics a common discussion topic for me. When I had lunch or breakfast at my grandparents', my grandpa always discussed politics with my grandma and involved me as well. Even though he was not imposing his opinions, I appreciated them as I found them very insightful. My grandpa was born in 1950 and spent part of his life during communism. He experienced the change of regime and, after the Velvet Revolution, got involved in local politics. He served as a deputy mayor in Dašice, a village in the Pardubice Region, and later served three terms as mayor.

❺ Did you want to follow his lead?

He made me realise that local politics is a little bit uncomfortable. People know you, keep watching your family, and you need to deal with many uncomfortable issues. But I was attracted anyway. My original plan was to run in the local elections to be held next year.

❻ Instead, you jumped right into high-level politics...

It was a last-minute decision. Back in March this year, I joined an organisation called Mladí starostové, which is the youth wing of the STAN movement. Then I jumped

at the opportunity when those who wanted to run for STAN went out to collect signatures to get support.

I needed 400 signatures to be fifth-listed on the ballot. It felt like Survivor. I experienced first-hand what it was like to ask for someone's signature; as part of that, I often heard what people thought of me, or got into a short discussion about why I wanted to get elected and what I wanted to change, and sometimes got recommendations on what I should focus on once elected.

❼ Once you had the signatures, what were the next steps?

I took part in a regional meeting of STAN in Pardubice. For most of the members, it was the first time they had seen me and they asked, Who is she? or What does she want? But I won their votes with my speech and thus was listed fifth on the ballot.

❽ And the intense face-to-face campaign started...

It was very tough. I faced many uncomfortable situations. I got many surprised, sometimes even unpleasant or slimy looks. Sometimes my appearance caught attention too. When I wore more visible make-up, I often heard people say things like, What will such a Barbie model do in politics... But there were also positive moments – such as discussions with secondary school students and young people. I really enjoyed that.

❾ What topics do you want to work on in Parliament?

I have three main ones. The first is the prevention of domestic violence, including stricter penalties and better protection for children. It is a topic that I feel I owe to the women who voted for me. During the last term, my colleague Barbora Urbanová managed to legislate a list that will prevent those who have abused a child in the past from working with children. That is great progress, and we will join forces in other areas.

My second topic is support for start-ups, aimed at young people and new initiatives. In Pardubice, we have a great organisation called P-Pink, which helps start-ups in the initial phase. I would like to approach them and start some cooperation. It may be an inspiration for another edition of the project called Have an idea? Come and show it to see how we can help.

The third area is cryptocurrencies, where I clearly trespassed onto my colleagues' ground, as I already hear them say, Hey, you are a woman. Keep off crypto. (laughs) Still, I would like to create a legislative framework for cryptocurrencies and do away with the bad feelings left by the Czech Bitcoingate. I believe that there will be room for all of this in the opposition camp.

❿ Do you plan to bring the Chamber of Deputies and its work closer to people?

Definitely. Many people have misconceptions and do not understand how the Chamber of Deputies works.

I would like to open it up and keep people informed. I will be creating videos and showing what we do and how our procedures work.

🗣️ Do you have a message for young people who think politics is not for them?

My main message would be: Be interested in politics – it is really important. Their future is at stake, and this is the only way to have some control. This

is the country where they will live and bring up new generations. They must not be indifferent.

🗣️ Your agenda is busier and busier... Do you still have time for your hobbies?

I do. Work-life balance is really important. I play the piano, so I devote my free time to music.

But I am also a big fan of the Dynamo ice hockey team in Pardubice, so I like watching their games.



Bc. Anežka Nedomová

(2001)

Anežka Nedomová is a Czech politician, German teacher and interpreter. She was born in Pardubice. She studied German Language at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy of the University of Pardubice and spent one year at the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität in Jena, Germany, as part of the Erasmus+ programme. She now studies German Language and Literature at Masaryk University in Brno. In 2025, she was elected a deputy to the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament.

In her free time, she enjoys travelling, foreign languages and meeting new people.

"I see the patient as an object. I have to."

TEXT Lada Součková • PHOTOS Jan Palla

As a little boy, he used to call 155 from public phone booths, just to "test" the emergency operators he admired. Today, he's the one answering those calls. He also rides out in the ambulance and serves as the media spokesperson for the Emergency Medical Service. "I still remember the call where I helped a mother save her choking baby. But there are cases where you do everything you possibly can – and it's still not enough," says Josef Strašík, a graduate of the Faculty of Health Studies.

❶ What does a person need to become a good paramedic?

Passion. Without a doubt. You really have to burn for this job. It demands a huge amount of time, and for me it's a whole lifestyle. Twelve-hour shifts that can be incredibly demanding – only someone who lives for this work can handle that. Even at university, studying Paramedicine at the Faculty of Health Studies (FHS), it was clear we were all the same type: energetic, active, outdoorsy, and constantly on the move.

❷ Where did your path lead once you graduated? Three days after my final exams, I joined the ambulance service in Pardubice. I already had an agreement to start at the emergency dispatch centre. They even asked if I wanted to take two months off to enjoy "one last summer holiday". But I didn't want to wait. I had studied precisely so I could join the EMS. And even though I'm originally from Vysočina, I knew I wanted to work in Pardubice – their service became close to my heart already during my studies.

❸ But you also work as a field paramedic...

Yes – I always wanted to work on the road. But first I had to complete a year of bedside practice, so to speak. I spent those twelve months at the new emergency department, where I met many graduates from our faculty.

❹ And now you're also the service's press officer. How did that happen?

I always enjoyed working with social media. At university, I was part of the faculty's PR team. After joining the ambulance service, I began cooperating with the then press officer. When she later left, she recommended me as her replacement, and the management agreed. I was over the moon. It's a creative role, and I need that in my life too.

❺ Did you prepare for the role?

I practised in front of a mirror and focused mainly on potential crisis situations – especially those where we might have made a mistake. That's the hardest and most sensitive scenario. In those moments, the key is not to freeze and to stay transparent. The moment you start dodging questions or being vague, it's bad. The public has a right to know. It's better to be open, tell journalists we'll gladly answer their questions, but that we may need some time to consult certain details with our legal department. Fortunately, we haven't faced anything like that yet – and I hope we never will.

❻ The media expect you to be available 24/7. With all your shifts, nights and difficult call-outs, that must be exhausting...

It is, but I enjoy it, so I manage. It took a while to find a system. I'm still improvising at times, still learning,

but I think I've found my rhythm. Of course my sleep is sometimes interrupted – especially after night shifts – by calls from journalists. Many of them don't understand how I juggle it all. Police and fire spokespersons are full-time roles. I still work shifts on the road and at the dispatch centre. Being a spokesperson is something I mostly do in my free time. But right now, it fulfils me. I come home, and start working again. And that brings us back to the beginning: it truly is a lifestyle.

❗ How do you know something has happened that might trigger calls from journalists?

Thanks to our early-alert system, the information comes directly from the dispatch centre. When an operator receives a call about an incident likely to attract media attention, they simply click the PO (press officer) button. That automatically sends the information to me and to the management so we're ready to respond. Typical examples are air-rescue missions, road accidents involving serious injuries, or anything happening in a public space, like the Velká Pardubická Steeplechase, where we responded to several collapses in the stands, or the recent fire in the underground garages of the Palác Pardubice shopping centre.

❗ I imagine these alerts can disrupt your sleep...

They come through even in silent mode, so my phone can ping at four in the morning, like today. I'm used to it now. I just check whether it's a mass-casualty incident, and if not, I go back to sleep. If it is, I get in the car and drive straight to the scene, so I can provide statements to the media directly from there.

❗ What can you actually reveal to the media?

I have to follow GDPR, so I can't disclose names or any details that could identify the patient. A lot depends on cooperation with the police, who release the official information. If I said something before they did, the affected families might learn about the situation from the media or social networks, simply because the police hadn't reached them yet. As paramedics, we can say only that we arrived, what kind of intervention we performed, and what type of facility we transported the patient to. I can say two cars collided, but not who was at fault. I can say the injuries were moderate, but not specify the exact type.

Panic, aggression and tears of relief

❗ Research shows that emergency dispatchers are among the professions most at risk of burnout. Does that match your experience?

It does. Mostly because we never see the patient; we can only help the caller with our voice. I can't stand next to them, I can't deliver first aid myself; all I can do is guide the caller as clearly and effectively as possible. And then everything depends on whether they cooperate. Feeling helpless is one thing. But dealing with verbal aggression is something else entirely. People really do shout at us a lot, and it's not pleasant. Another challenge is the nature of the work itself: hours of staring at a screen, your eyes fixed on the monitor, while the phone keeps ringing – loud, sharp, piercing. Psychologically, it's incredibly demanding. So yes, burnout can come quickly.





❗ **Aggression? Is it intentional, or just a reaction to shock?**

Both. Under stress, people act impulsively. But it's also surprisingly common for callers to start off unpleasant right from the beginning. They feel entitled to healthcare and treat us as people who "must serve them". After a few sentences, you usually know it's going to be a difficult call.

❗ **How do you work with people who are overwhelmed by emotions or completely shut down?**

The operator has to be assertive. You have to give orders and be a bit strict. In a stressful situation, people respond only to very clear instructions. So we give short, precise commands; we raise our voice – not because we're angry, but because we need them to listen and react. For example, during serious traffic accidents involving unconscious patients or someone in respiratory arrest, we start out very assertive. Once things stabilise and the adrenaline drops, we slow down and end the call by thanking them for their cooperation.

❗ **How long do such calls last?**

In the most serious situations – resuscitation or child-birth – we stay on the line until the ambulance arrives. But we also stay longer in less critical cases if we sense the caller is stressed. Sometimes we repeat the same sentences over and over, just so they know they're not alone. And that helps enormously.

❗ **Do people sometimes refuse to cooperate?**

They do. We call them "non-lucid callers". They refuse to follow instructions – they're simply panicking. I remember one call where I was guiding a resuscitation. I was giving instructions: tilt the patient's head back, start chest compressions... Instead, I heard the phone being slammed down and voices shouting: "Put a pillow under his head! Lift his legs!" And I'm yelling, "No, don't do that! Don't put anything under his head – he can't breathe!" But they weren't reacting at all. What happened was that a relative ran over and they started to act together. Of course I don't blame them – they were in shock. We never blame the family. But it's simply much easier to work with someone lucid – someone who understands the seriousness of the situation and follows instructions.

❗ **Which call or field response has stayed with you the most?**

A case involving a small child who stopped breathing. I was on the phone guiding the mother through airway clearance techniques because the child had aspirated a foreign object. She managed to do it successfully. And then the mother burst into tears. Even over the phone, I could feel her relief and gratitude. I was incredibly moved. These are the moments that recharge my batteries, because there are so many calls and responses that drain them.

❗ **How do you manage not to carry all those stories home with you?**

I have to leave everything behind. I deliberately avoid learning personal details. I don't want to know how many children someone has or whether they were a good parent. If I allowed that in, it would be unbearably hard. So I treat the patient as an "object" – not in a dehumanising way, but as someone for whom I must perform a precise sequence of necessary steps. Either it works, or it doesn't. I do everything I can, but sometimes it simply isn't enough. And that's fate.

❗ **Was this mindset natural for you from the start?**

No. But over time I realised it had to be this way, otherwise I'd lose my mind. And it's not only the critical cases. Sometimes we get called to an elderly woman with a fever – someone completely alone, with no one caring for her. Cases like that are often the most emotionally difficult. And in that moment, I tell myself: "I will never treat my parents like this." And that's where it has to end for me. It must.

❗ **Do you follow up afterwards to see how the patient is doing?**

Yes, but only from a professional point of view. I'm interested in the medical outcome: whether we diagnosed correctly, whether we reacted appropriately, whether we chose the best possible procedure.

❶ How many calls does your dispatch centre receive per day?

In the Pardubice Region, we handle around 180 call-outs a day, and roughly twice as many incoming calls. Not every call results in an ambulance being dispatched; sometimes it's not an emergency and we simply give advice, and sometimes it's a wrong number. Occasionally we even get calls from toddlers because their parents let them play with a phone. And sometimes it's just mischief. When I was little, I used to call from a public phone box – and then run home terrified after the operator said he could “see where I was”. Years later, I learned he only knew the phone box's number. (laughs) We were all kids once. Now when boys do the same thing, I call them back a few times so they realise it's not a joke.

❷ The Záchranka emergency app allows video calls. When do you use them?

We use them mainly during resuscitations. This way we can see how chest compressions are being performed and give guidance: “Move your hands higher, lock your elbows, speed up.” During major traffic accidents, video helps us get an overview of the situation. Sometimes we use it to examine wounds to better understand the injury. And yes – among operators there's a bit of friendly competition over who uses it more. The number of video calls will only increase. Technological progress is noticeable even in our field, and it helps us tremendously.

Students in the ambulance

❸ Paramedic students from FHS complete placements with the ambulance service. What can they try out?

At the dispatch centre, they spend a week listening in. They wear second headsets, hear how operators ask questions, see what they enter into the system, which crews they send out, and how communication works over radio and phone.

❹ And what about field work?

They join the ambulance crew for all call-outs and become full members of the team.

The capable ones can, under supervision, document cases, examine patients, or assist with airway management or establishing IV access during resuscitations. They basically get to try almost everything.

❺ You also run a special programme for highly active students. What does it involve?

I created the Students PAK project – a programme for proactive paramedic students in the Pardubice Region – right after becoming spokesperson.

As a student, I was very active myself, and thanks to that I got to places others didn't. Now I want to give the same opportunities to the next generation. The aim is to support proactive students – those who go above and beyond, who want to keep learning, and who willingly spend extra time with the ambulance service. Those are the people we want. In the pilot year,

selected students help us organise various events. In return, we let them experience things they normally wouldn't. Recently, for example, we carried out an active-shooter drill at the regional authority – we deployed three crews and assigned one student to each. When they take part in competitions, we equip them with our uniforms, give them space to train at our simulation centre, and prepare them professionally for the competition scenarios.

❻ How do you remember your own student years?

As one of the happiest periods of my life. I consider the University of Pardubice my alma mater and truly value how well it treats its students. Something was happening every semester. Events like Příliv were practically a national holiday for us. In the first year we formed a close-knit group of enthusiastic guys. The faculty and the leadership of the Paramedic programme contributed a lot. They organise events from the start – like the “paramedic orientation camp”, where students learn first aid but, more importantly, get to know each other. That's where long-lasting bonds are formed.

❼ Did you dream of becoming a paramedic even as a child?

Yes. As a little boy, I wanted to ride under the blue lights. Over time it grew into paramedicine, which I saw as an adrenaline-filled, meaningful and responsible job. If I weren't a paramedic, I'd probably be a police officer, firefighter or soldier – someone who helps others. Of course, the job isn't nonstop adrenaline. But there are moments when you arrive at a scene and you know everything now depends on you. Those are the moments when you think: “Yes. This is why I studied this.” It's a tremendous responsibility – and you have to be willing to accept it.

❽ What would you say to future paramedic students?

Follow your dream, don't be afraid, and take every opportunity that comes your way.

And above all – choose this career with your heart. Paramedicine isn't a job you can do just for the salary or job security. You have to love it. You have to walk into it with enthusiasm.



Amalia in Paris

“I’ve basically become a Parisian – and apparently I look *très chic*,” Says a Student from Pardubice

TEXT Zuzana Paulusová • **PHOTOS** Amalia Scheer’s archive • **ILLUSTRATION** Veronika Beňová

In many ways, she brings to mind a certain well-known TV character. She has swapped the streets of Pardubice for the boulevards of Paris – the fashion capital – where she is spending two semesters on study abroad. And because Amalia Scheer from the Faculty of Economics and Administration is also a successful model, she blends into the French capital as if she were born there. If she kept a blog about her Parisian adventure, it might look something like this.



Episode 1:**This is me – Amalia**

My name is Amalia Scheer. I'm half German, half Czech, and I live in Pardubice, where I also study. I work as a model. But recently, I packed my things and moved across Europe – to Paris. Not for modelling, though. For university. Crazy? Yes. Sometimes I still can't believe it...

I'd never really been to Paris before. Once I drove through it on my way to England. It was raining, I didn't even feel like getting out of the car – so that hardly counts. Everyone kept telling me not to go: that it's crowded with tourists, unsafe, not nearly as romantic as people claim. Oh well. But I kept dreaming. And then Emily in Paris appeared. Suddenly the city looked different: elegant, stylish, full of opportunities and unforgettable moments. And because I've been modelling for four years, Paris felt like a magnet. So I started dreaming... and planning. Already at the end of secondary school, long before graduation.

Episode 2: Choosing a university?
First check the Erasmus list

I knew I wanted to study economics and business. When choosing a university, the Erasmus offer was absolutely key. I checked in advance where each institution sends its students, for how long, and under what conditions. After weighing all the pros and cons – and figuring out how to balance school and modelling – the University of Pardubice came out on top. For my programme, Business Management, it even offers a twelve-month Erasmus stay. And Paris was one of the options. Decision made. I was accepted to the Faculty of Economics and Administration (FEA), and after my first year I began planning my dream semester abroad. I truly couldn't believe it was becoming real.

Episode 3: I'm going to Paris!
And I'm the first student from FEA

"What? You want to go to Paris on Erasmus?" the mobility coordinator blurted out.

"Yes," I replied. "There's one Paris partner university on the list. I'd like to put it as my first choice."

"Well, yes... we do have an agreement with them. If you pass the interview, you can go. I'm just surprised you don't want Madeira, Spain or Portugal – like most students."

"No, I really want Paris."

"Just bear in mind that classes may be in French. And no one from our faculty has been there yet, so we don't know exactly how it works."

"I only know a few words in French, but I'll manage."

Thank you."

And that was it – I would become the first FEA student to go to Paris on Erasmus. A pioneer.

In the summer I packed my suitcase and moved to Paris for the whole year. Is this really happening? Apparently yes!

Episode 4:
I found a flat. A genuinely amazing one

I have a beautiful view. I open my window – and there it is. The symbol of Paris. The Eiffel Tower. And yes, it really sparkles at night. I could stare at it for hours. Choosing this flat was the best decision ever. Everything is close – university, the city centre, the park I love. It's bright, sunny, perfectly located. Two high-ceilinged rooms, a lovely kitchen, modern furniture. Finally a home that looks exactly the way I imagined it. I'm not used to this. When an agency sends me somewhere to shoot, I don't choose the accommodation. I often share a flat with someone I've never met – sometimes someone who doesn't even speak English. You can simply get unlucky. But now? I found a place where I genuinely feel good. I spend lots of time at home – working out, studying, learning, cooking. And in Paris, cooking is pure joy. Shortly after arriving, I discovered the Point du Jour market – a paradise for anyone who loves food. So many colours, flavours and smells. Besides endless fruit and vegetables, I can buy fresh fish, cheeses, yoghurt... and of course, oysters.



Episode 5: **I belong here. I've become a chic Parisian**

I've been in Paris for more than two months now. And if there's one thing I truly enjoy, it's fashion. My wardrobe changed almost immediately. I don't care about brands – I'm inspired by people on the street. My friends keep telling me I fit in perfectly and that I'm chic. I blush a bit – but honestly, it feels wonderful.

So what do I wear most? Simplicity. Elegance. No flashy colours or huge logos. The weather is perfect for faux-fur coats – and I adore them. My hands get cold easily, so leather gloves are a must. Add a nice handbag... and voilà, ready to go.

Then I stop by the bakery where Emily buys croissants for Gabriel, and suddenly I feel like I'm on the show. From the outdoor seating you can see "her" apartment, and right next door is Gabriel's restaurant.

And I might also pop in for... butter. Yes – butter. They sell the best butter in the world here, the kind Michelin-star chefs use. If you bring home just one souvenir from Paris, make it the butter.

Episode 6: **I've found my Paris ritual**

What does my day look like? Honestly, quite similar to my life back home – only the scenery has changed. Every morning I do Pilates and then have breakfast. And that has become my Paris ritual. No, I don't go out for coffee and a croissant. My ritual is my porridge. Every single day. What makes it a ritual is the moment of calm. I sit by the window and watch Paris waking up. People hurrying through the streets, grabbing their coffee, heading to work, chatting, laughing. I wonder what their day will look like. And where exactly they're rushing to.

My day starts with classes – but first comes my favourite walk. I love heading towards the water. The Seine has this soothing, grounding effect. I often stop by the gardens near the Louvre. And guess what? They're not overcrowded at all. There are chairs and benches of every shape and size, and when I settle into one, I forget I'm in the middle of a huge city.

Tourists rush past trying to see everything, but I have time. And that's the best part – that I can truly enjoy Paris. I love museums and libraries too. And I'm fascinated by how many places here are completely free. Salut! Off to discover another one.



Episode 7: **I actually love school here. Really**

My walk to university is short. Every morning I walk through a park and just... marvel. It's amazing how the whole city changes with every season – and honestly, every day. In fifteen minutes, I'm there.

Université Paris Cité is one of the largest universities in Europe, with twenty campuses. Its old, grand buildings sometimes make me feel as if I'm walking into a castle. I have classes almost every day – but it's nowhere near as time-consuming as back home.

I enrolled in nine courses and – lucky me – all of them are in English! Well... except French. 😊 And I genuinely enjoy them all. They teach differently here. There's a strong focus on practice and presentation skills. I love the emphasis on communication and soft skills. We often work in teams or independently on projects that we later present. We actively participate – and learn just as much from each other as from the lecturers. There's also plenty of discussion, which I absolutely love.



Episode 8: **I want more experience. So I'm job-hunting**

Would you believe I've already received a job offer? One day, a woman stopped me on the street. She looked at me for a moment and suddenly blurted out:

"Do you have an agency? We'll take you right away," she said, handing me her business card. The next day she called and we arranged a meeting. I really wanted to focus on my studies... but receiving an opportunity like this in the fashion capital? Who would say no? Or would they?

I'm also looking elsewhere. I've been thinking about applying for an internship with a major fashion house. Maybe Chanel or LVMH – that would be incredible. Experience straight from the source. The only problem is that they only offer internships from January, and competition will be tough. But that's fine. I'm going for it. I'll let you know what happens.

Episode 9: **I have friends in Paris**

It's funny – after all my modelling travels, I had never met anyone from Paris. Not even from France. And I've travelled a lot. But now I have Monique and Pierre. We met in Japan over the summer. I told them I'd be moving to Paris for a year once I returned. "I'm from Paris," Pierre said.

"Me too! And I'll show you everything once you arrive. And we'll go shopping together, okay?" Monique added immediately.

Wait... I'm heading home knowing I've made friends in Japan whom I'll be seeing regularly in Paris just a few months later? Incredible.

Suddenly, leaving home felt easier. Lighter. And my mum was much calmer too.

I've also met wonderful people at university. There are 33 exchange students this year – apparently the largest group in a decade. A new record. Everyone's incredibly friendly, which was such a pleasant surprise.

I watched how people greet each other here. They kiss on the cheek – exactly like in the films.

And now I do too. The French see it as a gesture of friendship and closeness. Thanks to that little ritual, I feel like I belong here even more.

Episode 10: **What still surprises me?**

Paris is unbelievable in so many ways. Full of paradoxes, contrasts... and, surprisingly, a lot of tolerance. Sometimes perhaps too much.

If there's one thing I still don't understand, it's Paris traffic. I have a driving licence – I know the rules. Haha. But what happens here? Once I took a taxi and honestly couldn't believe what I was seeing. The driver stopped for no reason, honked at everything...

and no one except me reacted. Tolerated chaos? Probably. And here it seems completely normal. And the fact that there's a piano at the petrol station? Someone pinch me.

You can tell who's local by the way they cross the street. It took me two days to adapt. Everyone walks on red. And when it finally turns green? That's when the cars go.

Madness.

Another surprise: how young my classmates are. People start university earlier here, so most of them are only nineteen.

I envy them that head start a little.

Mirroring in Litomyšl

Meeting Students of the Faculty of Restoration Who Are Behind a New Sgraffito

TEXT Zuzana Paulusová • PHOTOS Vojtěch Mrověc

Until recently, the facade of a waterworks building in Litomyšl was marred by unsightly graffiti. Then, a group of students from the Studio of Restoration and Conservation of Wall Paintings, Sgraffito and Mosaics accepted the challenge and the original graffiti was replaced with a completely new work of art. A sgraffito called *Mirroring*. After weeks of preparation, the students spent nearly 17 hours completing the sgraffito, finishing at midnight to the applause from their classmates. They drew inspiration from the work of Bohdan Kopecký, a painter and Litomyšl native. “We wanted to work with an original work of art, and an art print by Bohdan Kopecký depicting the town of Litomyšl looked just perfect. In addition, the painter taught evening figure drawing classes in the predecessor of today’s Faculty of Restoration, which made the connection even more meaningful,” says Vojtěch Mrověc, a teacher at the Faculty of Restoration, who supervised the students alongside Zuzana Wichterlová as part of specialised artistic preparation. What he also appreciates is the fact that it is not clear at first glance that the sgraffito shows the town of Litomyšl, and anyone passing by must pause and look closely.



• Why sgraffito – and why mirrored?

Sgraffito production is a regular part of our artistic training, but cooperation with the town played an essential role in choosing the location. Daniel Brýdl, the Mayor of Litomyšl, has long supported public-space initiatives by the Faculty of Restoration, which made it easier to find a suitable location.

Zdeňka Vydrová, the town architect, suggested that a work from the town gallery be used. So we started looking for one. We tried different options with Vojtěch Mrověc, our teacher, and we discussed them and tried to look for the best one. Finally, we agreed on a work by Bohdan Kopecký. And why the mirroring? We thought it might be a good idea to shift the work not only in terms of technique, but also in

terms of meaning. We drew on a quote by American art critic Clement Greenberg that may be paraphrased as “The moment you turn the picture and stop reading it as an illusion of space, you begin to perceive it for what it truly is.” As a result, the new piece shows not only Litomyšl, but also its reflection – exploring the relationship between reality and its mirrored image.



2 How challenging was it to translate the work from paper to a facade?

Not easy... To translate a small piece of graphic art into such a big piece required a great amount of patience and thorough consideration of every single step. Even so, we did make mistakes and had to redo some parts. Lacking a canvas large enough for the entire composition, we divided the drawing into two parts – only to discover later that the enlarged halves didn't align perfectly.

3 How do you make sgraffito?

Creating sgraffito involves scratching a motif into wet plaster. It is impressive even though it is not as demanding in terms of materials. We first prepared the facade by removing the original surface, then applied a charcoal-tinted lime plaster. When the plaster was set, i.e. neither wet nor dry, we applied several layers of lime, and got a nice white surface where we drew the graphic piece. What followed were hours of meticulous scratching to reveal the dark plaster below. This made it possible to create a lovely contrast work that perfectly fits into our Litomyšl, both in terms of technique and theme.

Do you know... this is not the first time students of the Faculty of Restoration have left a creative mark in the town? There are, for example, on the garage behind the Sokol gym, on the Kotelna music bar, in the former U černého orla pub, or in the lane of Josef Váchal, full of scenes from his Bloody Novel. And more projects are planned. "We want to involve other students in completing the three remaining walls of the waterworks building," says Mrověc. "There's huge potential in turning neglected corners of the town – old boiler rooms, substations, forgotten spaces – into places with artistic value. For us, it's an inspiring challenge."

**To the water,
on a walk, to school,
to the city...
Anywhere
you like.**



**A T-shirt in
your faculty's
colour!**



SHOP NOW AT