

# "Arise, if you are a Zbrojovka fan!"

Collective Memory, Fan Engagement and One Football Stadium

Zuzana Botiková, Michal Šindelář

## Introduction

*"It is not about me asking a certain construction company, but it's about us, people from Brno. Here is the place to mention the famous motto: Arise, if you are a Zbrojovka fan! That speaks for it all."*

This is part of the media announcement by Petr Švancara, a former player for FC Zbrojovka, regarding his plan to play his career farewell match on stadium *Za Lužánkami* in Brno – a stadium, which has been at that point left abandoned and in ruins for 14 years. Švancara's announcement was featured in the evening news program of the Czech Television on February 13, 2015, and it was the first time the idea of reviving the abandoned stadium was presented to a wider public. Following this announcement, throughout the spring of 2015, dozens of volunteers, mostly fans of the local FC Zbrojovka club, would regularly meet at the stadium and work on reconstructing its largest standing terrace. On June 27, 2015, the partly refurbished stadium hosted an exhibition match, which attracted up to 35,000 of spectators.

The whole stadium revival initiative caught notable public and media attention. Similar volunteer fan initiatives regarding sports ground are quite rare in the Czech football context<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, feeling the responsibility to capture this one-of-a-kind initiative also in sociological terms, we have decided to explore the social meaning of the specific football ground *Za Lužánkami* and the whole revival campaign. In pursuing this aim, we have used a mixed method approach to gather research material, which would later be subdued to an analysis in alignment mainly with the works of John Bale (1989, 1993a, 1993b) on "sports geography".

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the only other notable example would be the case of Bohemians Prague 1905 Supporters' Trust, which was in opposition to a proposed relocation away from the clubs traditional venue in 2014 (Numerato, 2015a).

However, the presented paper also seeks to theoretically elaborate on the unique case of fan activism, which has appeared at the reconstruction works of the *Za Lužánkami* stadium. This initiative was neither organized by any official authority (e.g. the city of Brno, football club Zbrojovka, or the official fan club), nor did it concern a venue that could be used for its intended and nostalgically remembered function in the future. It was clear from the beginning that the old stadium, which lost its UEFA licence in 2001, would no longer host any official football matches. Therefore, the unpaid volunteer work invested in its refurbishing created an image of a romantic collective action. Our aim is to conceptualize this “romantic” type of fan activism on a theoretical level, through examining the performance of fans and volunteers engaged in the refurbishing of the *Za Lužánkami* stadium.

## Brief history of the *Za Lužánkami* stadium

Before getting to the latest case of fan activism in Brno, we shall take a closer look on the football ground in question. The history of the stadium *Za Lužánkami* appears in various official club publications (Čapka and Zabloudil, 2013; FC Zbrojovka, n.d.), as well as in a study on the history of architecture in Brno (Sedlák and Svobodová, 2014).

The area located behind the city park *Lužánky*<sup>2</sup> in the wider city centre of Brno, has been associated with sports infrastructure since 1920s, in the era of the First Czechoslovak republic (1918-1938). The selected location was an undeveloped, former waste area with one poor makeshift settlement standing in the neighbourhood. Due to the economic downturn of 1930s and the Second World War, the initial plans of a sport complex in that area were revisited in 1946, when a cooperative *National stadium* was founded. The main architect Bohumil Fiala, outlined *Za Lužánkami* area to become the largest sporting complex in Czechoslovakia. Such goal also became one of the city of Brno’s main priorities, since sport and physical education during socialist era was valued as an important constituent of the socialist society (Choutka, 1978)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Literal meaning of *Za Lužánkami* is “behind Lužánky”.

<sup>3</sup> The first construction success of this cooperative was building of an open-air ice-rink at the location in 1947.

The stadium *Za Lužánkami* was constructed in-between the years 1949-1953. The construction works were organized within the initiatives such as “Citizens Build Their Own City” or the “Operation T”, which were mostly self-financed projects (Sedlák and Svobodová, 2014: 304). However, such a “voluntary” collective action was initially centrally planned and ordered by a local communist party (Brummer and Konečný, 2015: 96–97).

In 1953 the stadium for football and track and field athletics was opened with a capacity of 40,000 spectators. In the 1960s the stadium's capacity was enlarged thanks to a construction of a three-storey western grandstand. Now with the capacity of 70,000 spectators, *Za Lužánkami* became the largest football stadium in Czechoslovakia (Sedlák and Svobodová, 2014: 306). It was the home ground of the team FC Zbrojovka Brno<sup>4</sup>. The team won (so far) its only league title in the season 1977/1978, in which the grounds recorded also the highest visitors' rate<sup>5</sup>. The majority of the spaces for spectators would be on eastern standing terraces.

A significant change in the governance of the football club as well as the stadium came in the early 1990s, after the fall of communist regime in Czechoslovakia. The area *Za Lužánkami* was bought by a local entrepreneur, Lubomír Hrstka, who had invested in the infrastructure (Soukupová, 2010). Nevertheless, the venues in the *Za Lužánkami* complex were falling into desolate condition. In 2001 the owner of *Za Lužánkami* football stadium went bankrupt and due to insufficient technical conditions of the stadium, the football club had to move to another venue – City Stadium Srbská, in the city borough of Královo Pole. The capacity of the interim venue is 12,500 places for a seated audience.

The stadium *Za Lužánkami* has become an asset of the city of Brno, however, due to its adverse technical state it was closed to public and left abandoned, with massive vegetation

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<sup>4</sup> The club was founded in 1913 as FC Židenice and it got its name Zbrojovka in 1947 derived from the local artillery factory. Despite the *Za Lužánkami* Stadium is tied mainly with the name Zbrojovka, the club has changed its name over the period of time: SK Židenice (1913 – 1947), Zbrojovka Brno (1951 – 1956), Spartak ZJŠ Brno (1956 – 1968), Zbrojovka Brno (1968 – 1992), Boby Brno (1992 – 2000), Stavo Artikel Brno (2000 – 2002), 1.FC Brno (2002 – 2010), FC Zbrojovka Brno (2010-)

<sup>5</sup> The highest recorded attendance in a league match was recorded in the season 1977/78 against ASVS Dukla Prague (around 45 000 visitors) and in 1996/97 against SK Slavia Prague (around 44 000 visitors). International match against Eintracht Frankfurt in 1979/1980 season saw attendance of around 52 000. (FC Zbrojovka, n.d.)

taking over the construction. In 2013, when the football club Zbrojovka celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary around 1,000 supporters marched to the old stadium and marked the occasion with extensive pyrotechnics. Similar marches of a smaller group of core supporters would take place also on a more regular basis.

## Stadiums as contested grounds of meaning

### Sites of memory

Since stadiums can be seen as “sociological entities which are formed spatially” (Maguire, 1995: 45), they attract different layers of scientific inquiry. Markovits and Hellerman (2001) study them as cultural spaces, arguing that various sport cultures need “their Meccas, their hallowed grounds distinguished by their distinctive age and the pedigree of their occupants” (2001: 20-21). We centre our analysis of the *Za Lužánkami* stadium revival initiative on the concept of *topophilia*, which can simply be described as a deep affection of people towards particular social spaces (Tuan, 1990). This kind of psychosocial relationship towards space emerges, as the particular place acquires an embedded meaning for the people that encounter it. In connection to sporting grounds, Giulianotti (1999: 69) adds that often “[s]upporters harbour topophilic feelings towards their grounds, including those lacking aesthetic or functional refinement”. That means a certain place can be significant for a particular group of people, despite it (e.g. from an architectural, or structural point of view) not fulfilling criteria of a likeable or even a safe place. Stadiums present significance, or cultural iconicity (Young, 2003), usually comes from the past memories.

The sites of memory, *lieux de mémoire*, according to Nora (1989), are significant to the societies, which face the situation of some break with the past - “torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists” (Nora, 1989: 7). If such memory is not transmitted by the actors, who have lived through it, this memory either disappears, or becomes externalised via symbolic memory (Assmann, 2011). That can also be related to the “topophilic memory”, which can be externally passed from generations to generations in a form of a collective emotional connection to a certain place.

Collective memory often gets transmitted in a form of narrative. Rapošová, Sejková and Szaló (2013) have studied the narratives linked to an artillery factory of *Zbrojovka Brno* in its current “brownfield” form. One of the important narratives that stood out from their research was the narrative tied to the *Zbrojovka football club*<sup>6</sup>. Locals would strongly associate the industrial grounds with the local football club and its old stadium, marking it as an important piece of the urban identity of Brno inhabitants.

### Sites of action

According to Wagner (2002) modern institutions are constituted by a durable set of rules and resources, therefore they both enable and constrain agency of an individual. While Giulianotti (1999) relates the idea of “modern institution” also to football; Archetti (Archetti in Bale 1993b) sees an archetype of modernity also in football stadiums. This notion is demonstrated by the increased “spatial rationality and confinement” (Archetti in Bale 1993b: 121) of the sports venues. Not only the intra-stadium space introduces boundaries between players and spectators, but also between different groups of spectators (based on their club affiliation or socio-economic status). We can agree that the cultural experience for both players and spectators at a football match has been altered. According to Giulianotti (2002), in the case of football spectators we can observe a shift from rather passive and ritualistic behaviour to problem-oriented action.

The mainstream research on fan activism, however, reflects mainly on the tension between supporters on one side and clubs’ and sports governance on the other side. Supporters oppose introduction of new rules and situations, such as mandatory seating at the stadiums (Brown, 2010), clubs’ ownership transactions (Brown, 2007) or even the whole neo-liberal business culture of contemporary football (Numerato, 2015b; Webber, 2015). However, the situation in modern football culture is not only one-sided. Cleland (2010) captures the changing relationship between supporters and football clubs, when new inclusive policies to institutionalize regular communication with its supporters are introduced. A special type of supporters’ activism emerges when the football club (or its image) is endangered, e.g. by

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<sup>6</sup> FC Zbrojovka got its name in 1947 due to the fact that the artillery factory was its main sponsor at that time (Čapka and Zabloužil, 2013: 91).

financial mismanagement or relocation from the fan community (Brown, 2007, 2008, 2010; Millward and Poulton, 2014; Numerato, 2015a; Reid, 2013; Wilson and White, 2002)<sup>7</sup> .

Despite all the "modern obstacles" given to the joy of a football game, fans manage to keep and sustain their unique features of commonality. When studying the fan culture in Scotland, Giulianotti (1991, 1995) speaks about a special "sociability" of football fans - their spontaneity to engage in common activities. One of the visible outcomes of such a sociability is the prepared and enjoyed festival on the stadium stands, which Giulianotti labels as a case of *carnavalesque* (Bakhtin, 1984; Barthes, 1975). *Carnival* is a state of losing social control, when the body itself becomes the bearer of identity and joy. Carnavalesque atmosphere expects spontaneous participation, a participation that is not restricted by a constant self-control and constraint. Umberto Eco (1984), however, notes that in the postmodern era carnival changes into an "authorized transgression", meaning that it is restricted by various institutional factors. In the case of football fans, those are things as the monitoring of stadiums via the ever-present CCTV cameras, organizers and police. Despite its postmodern restricted quality, Giulianotti (1995) claims that *carnavalesque* always threatens to transgress boundaries granted to it.

When following the revival initiative at the Za Lužánkami stadium, we have observed several examples of fan activism related to the specific sporting ground. These observed activities could be clustered into those aimed at and nurtured by the nostalgia connected to the stadium terraces and those of preparing and choreographing the awaited exhibition match, which was to take place at the stadium. While the first set of activities was collectively legitimised by the need to resuscitate the lost past, the second set of activities was very much set in present times and partially also reflected on the fan movements active within the football world today.

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<sup>7</sup> Examples of fan activism in connection to privatisation and commercialization of sports venues can be observed also in regard to other sports and in other geo-cultural setting (Bilanger, 2000; Hannigan, 2006).

## Methodology and research objectives

Having followed the revival cause since its official release date (Feb. 13, 2015), our research intention was to closely observe the aims and the means this initiative has undertaken, describe them, as well as look for some relevant theoretical framing.

The opening phase of the research was based mainly on the exploratory and descriptive methodology – tracking down and collecting news articles and visual documents in online media and on social networks. This stage was later followed by personally attending the volunteer works taking place at the *Za Lužánkami* stadium. At these sessions we would engage in participatory observation – when, besides following the construction works underway on the stadium, we would also get physically involved in them. This personal engagement and shared experience with the works helped us to approach the volunteers on an informal level. Besides that, we interviewed main actors of the initiative (e.g. leaders of the volunteer works, leaders of the fan clubs) and observed their engagement in the group's dynamics. We also attended the “capstone” of the whole initiative – the farewell exhibition match (June 27, 2015).

There were 15 officially announced working sessions, with on average 30-50 volunteers taking part in them. Briefly summarizing the demographics, the majority of the volunteers were middle-aged working-class men, mostly from Brno and its surrounding area. We have conducted in-depth interviews with all six leading figures of the volunteer initiative, some of them repeatedly as the works on the stadium were advancing and the exhibition match was getting closer. Both on record, but also informally we got to speak to more than a dozen of volunteers, as we have personally attended six voluntary work sessions - there were fifteen work sessions over the course of four months, those that we didn't attend we followed through the content published by volunteers on social media. Additionally, we collected and analysed documents of various forms: online reviews on the stadium's social network fan-page, associated webpages, *FC Zbrojovka* supporters' chants and choreographies, and online discussions threads concerned with the stadium's revival.

The initial and rather uninformed research question, “What is happening at Za Lužánkami stadium?”, was gradually transformed to an inquiry into the specific topophilic qualities of the Za Lužánkami stadium as well as the activist movement connected to it. This analytical concern was backed by Bale (1993), who notes that topophilia can be converted into location-based activism. Specifically, we asked ourselves two kinds of research questions. First, what constitutes the topophilic relationship of activists with the Za Lužánkami stadium? And secondly, how does this specific volunteer initiative fit into the framework of research on football activism?

## What made Za Lužánkami unique

References towards the stadium’s “glorious” past were visibly present within the revivalist initiative, through different communication channels. Most accessible were the “ratings” of the place in question on its social network fan page:

*"I have lived right above the stadium since I was born... I grew up with it, I live with it, and once the bulldozers bury it, they will bury also a great part of me... a place, where 30,000 spectators would come... after it was closed, I would go there to rest, refresh, think about life, dream.... the newly built terraces will be missed... together with the whole stadium Za Lužánkami" ("Fotbalový stadion za Lužánkami v Brně," n.d.)*

Among the prevalent concepts that stood out from the “virtual ratings” of the *Za Lužánkami* stadium were the notions of

- *remarkable atmosphere;*
- *high spectator attendance;*
- *childhood memories;*
- *sacredness of the place;*
- *“the kop;”*
- *and the idea of a “glorious return.”*

We have referred to these concepts also when carrying out face-to-face interviews with the volunteers, who attended the stadium’s reconstruction. Further analysis shows how the

concept of topophilia links to the selected traits present in the collective memory revival as well as the recent activism.

## Atmosphere

When conceptualizing specific atmosphere at a sports venue, one has to consider that the atmosphere is a product of interaction between spectators and performers (i.e. football teams), on the other hand, the atmosphere is generated by spectators and their own interactions (e.g. between home and away supporters<sup>8</sup>). For those who personally attend football matches, atmosphere at the stadium constitutes a significant part of the overall experience. According to Giulanotti (1999), this applies to both players and spectators. “The more intense the ‘atmosphere’, the more pleasurable the game.” (Giulianotti, 1999: 69)

*“I used to go to Za Lužánky when I was 15-17 years old, and there was always amazing atmosphere. I will never forget!”*

*“Hell yeah! I am having goose bumps even when I am reading about it.”* (“Fotbalový stadion za Lužánkami v Brně,” n.d.)

The uniqueness of the atmosphere at *Za Lužánkami* stadium would be highlighted among the fans by comparing it to other venues. In the case of Brno, it was either the rival clubs from Prague, or the club’s new venue City Stadium Srbská.

*“Every time I went to a Zbrojovka game, there was a great attendance and awesome fan background... Prague could only envy.”* (“Fotbalový stadion za Lužánkami v Brně,” n.d.)

*“People would come here because of the atmosphere, and that is what Srbská lacks and will never have... Even if we sold out all tickets, which we won’t. That’s is the whole tragedy. The fact that the team plays poor football has nothing to do with it. You don’t go to Srbská to enjoy yourself, you go there to suffer.”*

[from an interview with a volunteer Š., 25.4.2015]

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<sup>8</sup> At particular moments of fan activities, all differences among the spectators blend together, such as Gary Whannel (1993) describes: “(t)he Mexican wave, that most strange and all-embracing ritual, is divorced even of partisan affiliation – it does not support one side or the other, it demands universal involvement, and ultimately celebrates the collective presence of the crowd.” (Whannel, 1993: 346)

Since the year 2001, when FC Zbrojovka relocated to the City Stadium Srbská, the attendance rate dropped significantly. Some of the fans we spoke to said they stopped visiting FC Zbrojovka matches after their club was relocated.

### Attendance

It was the memory of a regular high stadium attendance, which kept on reappearing with the memories of the special atmosphere at the *Za Lužánkami* stadium. However, the remembered rates and occasions when those were achieved differ within the fan memories.

*"It's connected to the football and to the memories, nostalgia and excitement, which used to be here, especially when the venue was full. When there was a normal match here, a league match, there would be 10 to 20 thousand people. We used to have the highest attendance in the whole league."*

[from an interview with a volunteer M, 18.4.2015]

When in 2001 FC Zbrojovka moved to the City stadium Srbská, the sharp decline in spectator turnout was attributed to the missing "heart" which was "left behind" at the beloved stadium *Za Lužánkami*. The City stadium Srbská was also constructed in early 1950s, however, it underwent a massive reconstruction in 2001. Now it is a modern ground with a capacity of 12,550 for seated audience. After FC Zbrojovka moved to this venue, it witnessed drop of average attendance per home match below 5,000 spectators. Although during the era of changing political regimes and revolution years of 1989 to 1992, there was a similar attendance at the *Za Lužánkami* stadium, in general the average attendance at the old stadium varied between 10 000 and 20 000, with the maximum turnout per single match reaching 40 000 spectators. Interviewed fans remembered, that even when the club descended to the 2<sup>nd</sup> league, the fans would always show up at a home match:

*"It wouldn't matter whether 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> league was played here. 40 000 people would come even for 2<sup>nd</sup> league matches."*

[from an interview with a volunteer I., 18.4.2015]

We have further analysed the data on stadium attendance. The hypothesis regarding the relationship between spectator turnouts, type of stadium and the football performance were

analysed using linear regression. For football performance several indicators were available, but to make the interpretation easier, the final rank at the end of a season that was chosen<sup>9</sup> for the analysis.

Both the type of stadium and football performance in the season are very strong predictors of spectator turnout together explaining 67% of data variance. The turnout difference between two stadia is 7 000 when football performance is controlled for. In other words, the specific topophilic quality of stadium *Za Lužánkami* would attract on average 7000 spectators more than *City stadium Srbská* no matter how good the football performance was. However, the football performance itself is a strong predictor too. One rank better equals an average of 500 more spectators for a home match.

Uniqueness of the atmosphere of stadium *Za Lužánkami* would therefore attract on average 7000 spectators more than the current stadium *Srbská*. What constitutes the uniqueness of such place? Why did the fans not reproduce the “great atmosphere” at the new stadium?

### Spatial organization of the venue

Spatial organization and the design of the stadium may shape how spectators relate themselves to the stadium. Stadium *Za Lužánkami*, was originally designed as a sporting venue combining a football pitch and an athletic track.

*“This is not a perfect stadium for football, because of the athletic track. Spectators are far from the pitch. But despite that, I can recall the turnout of 45 thousand fans cheering for the team. And those cheering ones were mostly in the kop, seated people wouldn’t be part of it.”*

[from an interview with a volunteer P., 25.4.2015]

The eastern standing terraces facing the central part of the pitch would be home for “the kop” (*kotel*), where the most active *FC Zbrojovka’s* supporters used to stand. According to Giulianotti (1999), it is especially the “participation in the terrace events: singing, chanting and flagwaving; or simply swaying inside the packed mass of humanity in accord with the distant, focal events on the pitch” that constitutes an important topophilic experience (Giulianotti,

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<sup>9</sup> The predictive power of type of stadium remains relatively same when different football performance indicators (no. of wins, points, scored goals) are used. For all models see appendix 1.

1999: 81). Attractiveness of the kop at the *Za Lužánkami* stadium is still well remembered among today's supporters and volunteer workers:

*"When I was perhaps in grade seven<sup>10</sup> I would watch the kop for the full 90 minutes. Not the football match. That's how I realized I should be part of it."*

[from an interview with a volunteer J., 25.4.2015]

*"Every time we went to the stadium as youngsters, we would try to get to the kop [...] that's where the most loyal supporters, the loudest chants and greatest life used to be. It was the strongest power charge of the whole stadium. "*

[from an interview with a volunteer M., 18.4.2015]

Standing terraces create a sense of territoriality. "Many people who stand at football matches have made their way to the same spot year after year [...] Territory – occupying it, defending it, and attacking and invading that of others – was a key element in the growth of terrace subcultures of the 1960s and 70s." (Whannel 1993: 346) A similar observation could be made also at the *Za Lužánkami* stadium. The packed terrace of the kop would not allow spectators to leave freely and come back to the same spot, therefore one had to stay cinched to the spot and have an "accomplice" to get the refreshments.

*"One had to come in advance into the kop and stay there. Because if you left you wouldn't get your spot back [...] We were like hens on a perch, packed tightly together, there was no free space left."*

[from an interview with a volunteer M., 18.4.2015]

During the revival initiative of 2015, it was the eastern standing terraces, including the former kop area that were refurbished by the volunteers. It was chosen by the structural designer as a terrace that can also sustain the most visitors. This decision gave a great symbolic vibe to the whole reconstruction works. In special breaks during the works, volunteers would gather in the kop area and sing some of the FC Zbrojovka's chants<sup>11</sup>. For press photo sessions, they

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<sup>10</sup> In elementary school corresponding to app. 12 years of age.

<sup>11</sup> When asked about the difference to singing the chants at current venue, the volunteers would highlight and compliment the better acoustics at the *Za Lužánkami* stadium.

would also decorate the kop with the clubs flags. Moreover, during the concreting works on the steps of terrace, some fans would engrave their names or the names of their supporters group into the freshly laid concrete. By doing so they marked “their spot” and associated themselves with the particular place of the terrace. The terrace of stadium *Za Lužánkami*, seemingly vast and lacking any visible boundaries, would be structured symbolically by the spectators defining “their spots” and thus creating their own boundaries.

## Topophilic activism

The refurbishing of Za Lužánkami stadium culminated with the exhibition “farewell” match of Petr Švancara, which took place on June 27, 2015. The expected visitors turnout was estimated for 25 000 spectators<sup>12</sup>. The initiative was strongly supported and covered by local media (occasionally also by nationwide media), local politicians<sup>13</sup>, civic activists, small local entrepreneurs as well as the local brewery, which provided refreshments. It is important to note also the involvement of local volunteer firefighters, who helped with watering the grass on the football pitch, since there was no water and electricity at the venue.

The volunteer works at the *Za Lužánkami* stadium might represent a romantic idea of a collective action, which sees people willingly participating in their free time for the common good. One of the most repeated legitimations of such action was “fixing what others failed to protect”, even though it was acknowledged that the stadium would no longer be able to serve its initial purpose.

The other admitted purpose was the strengthening of the local fan community. However, the volunteer group was not of a homogenous supporter background, but came from various organized fan groups of the same team. The symbolic division of this otherwise proclaimed united community would take place for example, when the fans/volunteers “flagged” their working spots on the stadium by placing a flag or a banner of their fan group on the barrier

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<sup>12</sup> According to the police estimates after the match, up to 35 000 people came to the stadium area (ČTK, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> It is also important to note the change in the city council after the municipal elections in 2014, which has brought more favourable atmosphere for the whole revival initiative. This was mainly stemming from the civic group Žít Brno (Live Brno), which had the case of Za Lužánkami stadium in its electoral programme.

railings. Some of the volunteers were regular visitors of FC Zbrojovka matches, therefore they knew each other before attending the working sessions. However, this was not a necessity. As one of the interviewed volunteers explained, the sense of community came in time.

*"They didn't know each other. Look, when I came here for the first time, nobody knew anybody. [...] We all know each other now. Some have been here four times, some five times. Šeba has been here eight times, I have been here eight times. There are guys who come here after night shifts, like that Jura... the small, fat one... yep, so he always comes here after a night shift [...]."*

[from an interview with a volunteer I., 11 April 2015]

While the core of the volunteer workers was made of middle-aged men, there was also a notable group of older men (two of them have worked on parts of the original construction works in 1950s, who would either bring their spouses or their grandchildren along. The social mingling would take place especially within the volunteer groups from the same fan bases or age groups.

### Preparing and performing the celebrative carnival

The unique situation of the revival initiative of the *Za Lužánkami* stadium regarding the carnivalesque performances lies in the sole fact that the football ground was officially no longer listed as a sporting venue, therefore many of the institutional restrictions did not apply to the fan activities. Therefore the only rules restricting the carnival at the stadium were those set by the organizers – fans themselves. Most of these rules would emerge and be negotiated during the preparation of the exhibition match. During the volunteer works on the stadium, part of the core volunteers also devoted time to negotiate the part fans would play during the exhibition match. These negotiations consisted of creating choreographies, banners, flags and deciding when and where the pyrotechnics would go off. For this purpose the fans have set up a so called “choreo bank account”, where they tried to crowd-fund the supplies for the stadium carnival. These supplies were also based on a nostalgic aspect:

*"For example, I used to have the largest flag. Perhaps the largest in Europe, it was 6x6 metres. I used to do this from the beginnings... like I would walk around the Komín borough and collect*

*leaflets, so that we could cut them up with scissors and make confetti. After doing this for a week we had calluses on our hands.”*

[from an interview with a volunteer Š., 18. April 2015]

The volunteer, who spoke about his past “carnavalesque” activities was also one of the most engaged actors in preparing the exhibition match. Before the exhibition match he created a large FC Zbrojovka flag, as well as commemorative T-shirts, which he sold at the volunteer works. These had a printed slogan based on words of the Czech national anthem “*Kde domov můj?*” (*Where is my home?*) with a follow up answer “*Za Lužánkami since 1953*”. A considerable approbation of the national anthem to the local setting of Brno happened also during the exhibition match, when a popular Czech singer was asked to sing the national anthem before the match, however, the stands started singing a Moravian song referring to their distinctive local identity. No national anthem was sung afterwards.

The celebratory event taking place on the pitch would be complemented by visual choreography and chants taking place on the eastern terrace, including the kop area in the centre of the stand. Pyrotechnics were heavily used, as such actions are not allowed at the official football matches organized by the Czech Football Association. Since the event was taking place at a venue no longer officially registered within the Association, the fan choreographies had no outer regulations (only the safety regulations imposed by the firefighters and police forces). However, some regulations of the cheering were imposed from within the fan community by fan club or volunteer leaders as a prevention to possible action taken by the police forces.

## Follow up activism

Even though our scientific inquiry into the case of Za Lužánkami stadium ended with the exhibition match, it is also important to note the follow up activities of the mobilised fans. During the match, people could sign a petition aimed at “bringing back football Za Lužánky”. This petition, initiated by the player Švancara and the local brewery Starobrno, addressed the city council to build a new stadium in the location of the old one by the year 2020. The

wording of the petition stresses the need for an honourable replacement of the old stadium, which would have a positive effect on the local identity and pride of the Brno residents.

The original stadium Za Lužánkami has since the refurbishing works hosted several community events, mainly organized by and for the group of volunteers who worked at its renovation. Moreover, in summer of 2016, the volunteer works at the stadium won Sustainability and Community section of the Stadium Business Awards competition.

## Concluding remarks

This case study tried to map and to explain the attachment of volunteers, who worked on the refurbishing of the desolated stadium *Za Lužánkami*. The results of our inquiry point to certain toponymic qualities of the space, which function as the referential points in collective memory connected to it. These qualities would include the size of the stadium, the kop area, high spectator attendance numbers as well as the atmosphere these spectators created. Such characteristics go in line with the arguments of Bale (1993) and Giulianotti (1999) regarding the toponymic sentiments aimed towards sports ground. Since the sports ground in question has also encountered a distinct “break with the past” (Nora, 1989), when the football club was relocated, it became a site of collective memory. This past would be nostalgically highlighted in the narratives as the “good old times”, when the stadium would host both a successful club as well as masses of cheering fans.

It was this communal toponymic nostalgia that gave way to the “romantic” collective volunteer action of the refurbishing works on the stadium grounds. Even though this collective action was inspired by the memories tied to a certain stadium construction, a construction with no future, there were also other more pragmatic reasons simultaneously running with this rather naive initiative. The public demand for a new stadium to be built on the location of the former popular venue corresponds with some of the pragmatic initiatives of fan communities in the post-modern era (Numerato 2015b). However, at the same time the initiative gave space to relive the hedonistic *carnavalesque* atmosphere of fan engagement, when there are no official boundaries to be transgressed by the governing institutions. Such toponymic activism enabled sociability of fans and potential strengthening of the local football but also civic community.

Even though this study was limited by time and space solely to the initiative of the football community in Brno, nevertheless we see its significance in enriching the mainstream research on fan activism not only geographically, but also by bringing up example of momentary selfless activities of football fans. Such activities might be only one at a time example; nevertheless they build up on quite solid grounds of collective memory and nostalgia.

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