

# žurnál

Magazine of Palacký University Olomouc, 2025/1

interview

## New UP Rector Michael Kohajda



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Genius loci...







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cover – new UP Rector Michael Kohajda | photo: Jakub Čermák

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*Dear colleagues, dear students,*

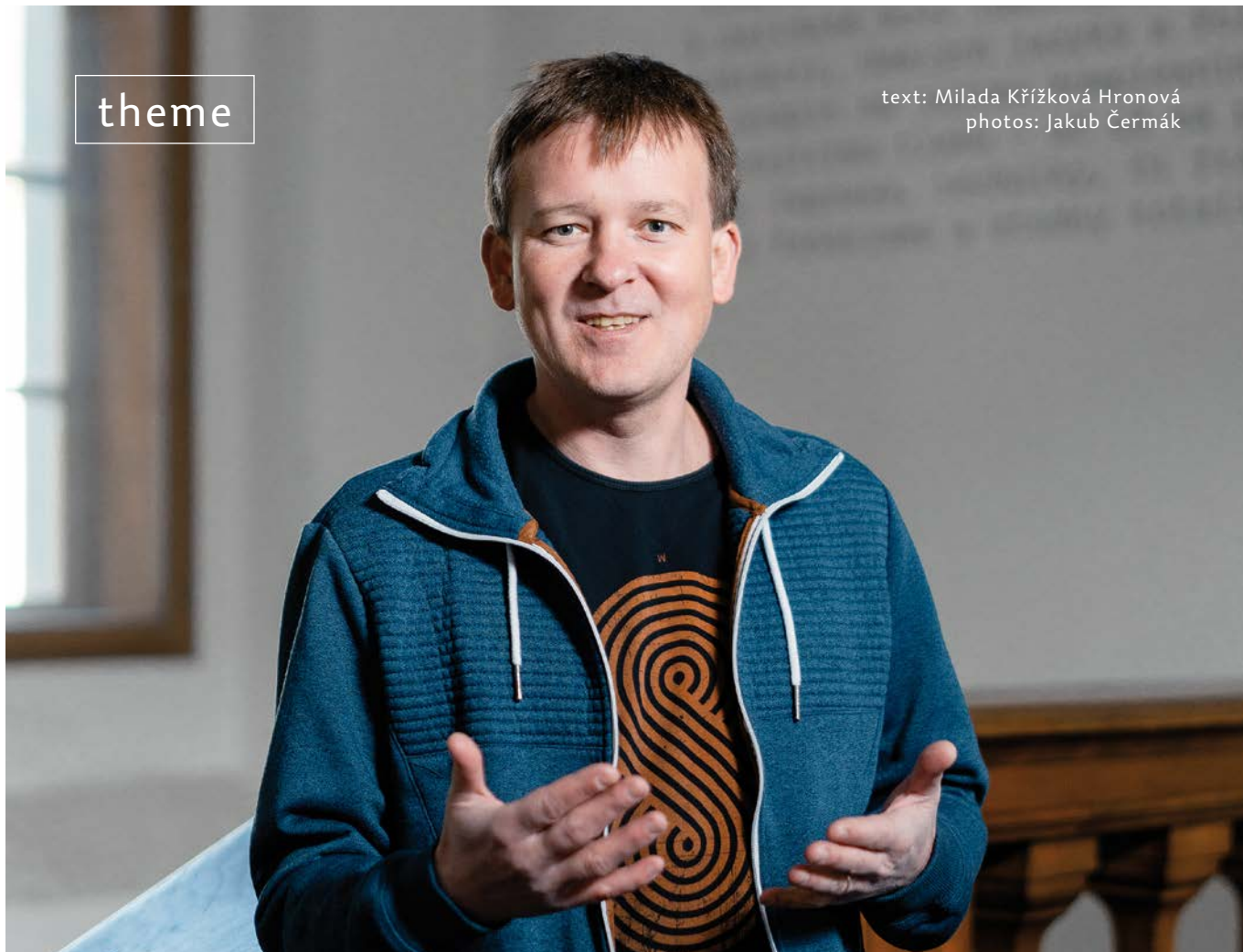
*You’re looking at a new issue of the English-language UP Žurnál – and with it, my very first message as Rector. Stepping into this role is a great honour for me, but also a big responsibility. A university isn’t just an institution – it’s first and foremost a community of people who, every single day, help shape how it works, how it grows, and where it’s headed.*

*I’d like to sincerely thank all our staff for the work you do day-in and day-out: for your expertise, your patience, and the care and humanity you bring to teaching, research, administration, and support services. Without your dedication, the University simply couldn’t do what it does.*

*A special thank-you goes to our students as well – for your curiosity, your drive to learn, and for the way you take on the many challenges that come with studying. I know how difficult the academic year can be, so I truly admire your determination.*

*I wish you all a peaceful and refreshing summer – one that brings you the rest you deserve, new ideas, and plenty of energy for the time ahead. I’m looking forward to seeing you and working with you in the new academic year, as we continue writing the next chapter in the life of our university. Because we all share one story – the story of Palacký University Olomouc.*

*Michael Kohajda, UP Rector*



# The world, artificial intelligence, and Palacký University

It is with us and all around us. Artificial intelligence. It searches and sorts information, corrects our writing, inspires, can draw up plans or recommendations, even diagnose illnesses. People use it today and every day, although ideas of what it actually is vary. Is it an artificial ability to mimic human abilities? Definitely. At Palacký University, however, AI is also a scientific challenge.

Take linguists: they can now analyse the texts of writers, politicians, even murderers through AI. Their unique technology enables automatic profiling of people. Several months ago, they began offering software that can also detect AI. Their newly developed aid can mimic humans even

better than ChatGPT, Gemini, or Copilot. These are groundbreaking discoveries, but what are they good for?

“We can assist in diverse areas, such as HR, online psychotherapy, court cases, or communication with at-risk groups. There is already a place for our technology in creating personalised advertising or in the fight against extremism, terrorism, and disinformation. Previous methods could not provide such a high level of certainty of authorship in automatic profiling of persons. Today, we only need about 1,500 words to do that. The second discovery is that we know how to detect artificial intelligence—we can even determine which AI created a post,” explained Dan Faltýnek

from the UP Faculty of Arts (UP FA) Department of General Linguistics.

In order to introduce the newly developed software, he pointed out that until recently no AI could speak like a human. According to Faltýnek, AI has always behaved like a machine, like a specific artificial persona delimited by the given theme and its corresponding linguistic expression.

“Until now, you could always tell it wasn’t a real person. It lacked that greater degree of personalisation. However, our new software can hide the origin of an AI text by mimicking the language of a particular person. Imagine that you want to buy laundry detergent and a person in an internet advert speaks to you in ‘your’

voice. Such an offer will get your attention much more than general AI talking to you. Now you're asking, how we can speak in 'your' voice? We 'absorb' your key vocabulary from posts you've published on the internet using our forensic method. From these, we then create a profile that will show us how you think, how you form sentences, which words you use in a sentence and where, and what is, for example, unconsciously reflected in the vocabulary you produce. We set the purpose and level of personalisation, and based on this, we then prepare the communication you desire. The higher level of personalisation increases the effectiveness of the message."

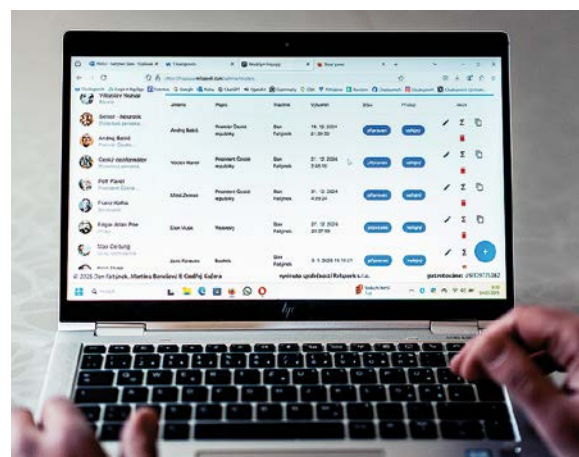
Such technology will surely find applications in today's world beyond just advertising. According to UP FA linguists, it can be used in communication with the elderly, adolescents, or at-risk groups. Clients can also use it to unify and achieve desired corporate communications. It could be used in the communications of banking institutions, or the state with its people. It may also have interesting applications for security forces.

Researchers from Palacký University can now make such personalised texts closer to the real texts of an author. They are also able to read a disinformation disseminator's vocabulary and find out how

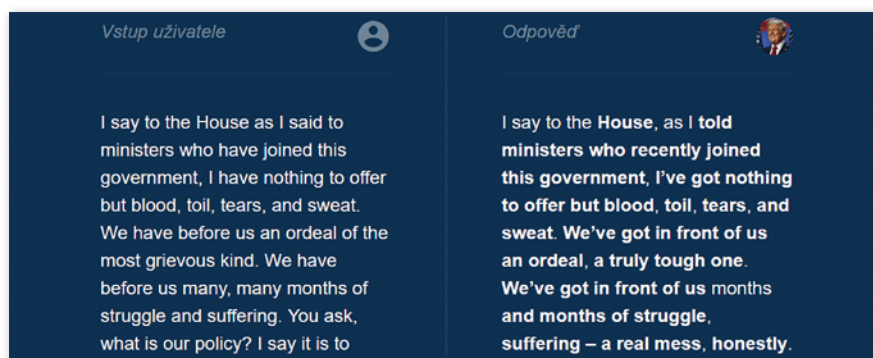
they think. Via the new technology, they then create a persona that speaks the language of the disseminator. Of course, once they do that, they start seeding counterarguments into the communication.

"We will thus make the situation significantly more difficult for the disinformation source, with the aim of making trusted news sources more credible. If we manage to prevent any additional percentage of people from succumbing to disinformation, this could really help society a lot," said Faltýnek, adding that with regard to ethical issues, the new tools will be used above all where they can be of benefit to people.

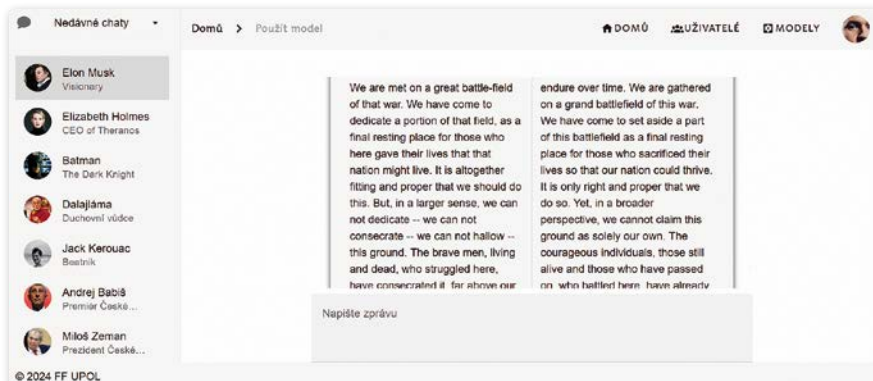
AI can now handle not only various production tasks, but also image recognition, human speech recognition, and more. It is a promising new scientific field with a number of subfields. In our modern, internet-connected society, it can be encountered at work, shopping, and in our leisure activities. Its impact on society, however, can barely be predicted now. Education that focuses on the use and risks of new technologies and the ability to adapt will definitely be crucial. However, the innovations that are already taking place through it have the potential to change society – it could be just as earth-shaking as the Industrial Revolution.



Cloakspeech software – an environment to create language models of specific individuals. The user inputs a specific person's texts, selects parameters to optimally analyse their linguistic characteristics using the hapax method, and the software then provides the person's characteristics to generate texts in a large language model (LLM). The administrator modifies the personality model according to the client's requirements and provides them to users or via an API chatbot, etc.



Cloakspeech software: a forensic linguistic (hapax) method identifies the linguistic specifics typical for a certain person. In a large language model (GPT-4o), it modifies a) texts supplied by the client, b) conversation with a chatbot. The modification mimics the expressions of the selected person. Based on a specific person's linguistic core, the software allows the creation of personas according to the client's requirements: emphasising content by a given marketing strategy, unifying corporate communication, branding, strengthening anti-disinformation campaigns, cross-sectional personas of particular social groups such as seniors (neurotic, open-minded, etc.), citizens of the Olomouc Region, a disinformation disseminator, etc. Above all, the software allows communication to be tailored to a specific individual.







theme

DÍKY, ŽE JSTE SOUČÁSTÍ AFO VESMÍRU  
THANK YOU FOR BEING PART OF THE AFO UNIVERSE

text: Ivana Pustějovská  
photos: J. Hromádko, K. Holbová, J. Čermák,  
R. Bláhová, A. Šrejber, J. Skácelík

# Sixty years of Academia Film Olomouc: A witness to the transformation of the times and society

When we say the word “film”, we immediately think “entertainment”. Films can make us cry, laugh, even make us angry. But films can do so much more: they can teach us and help us understand even the most complex problems in our world. Filmmakers and scientists have found a common language. The result? Spellbinders. And this is exactly the kind of film the International Festival of Science Documentary Films – Academia Film Olomouc – has been offering its audiences for 60 years.

The thousands of people at the end of April this year who were choosing from more than four hundred items on the programme, scratching their heads trying to figure out how to catch as many screenings, talks, and concerts as possible, certainly did not realise the fact that they were a part of film history. AFO, the acronym the festival goes by, has no peer in Europe. It is a unique event, born at Palacký University, and in its sixty years has gone through an unprecedented transformation from a couple of screenings for a few dozen professionals to today’s mega-event.

“For quite a long time, until the Velvet Revolution, the festival was seen as more of a professional environment for creators, academics, and filmmakers to meet. A place they could have discussions, exchange experience, and push the genre forward. It was open to the public from the very beginning, but there was no huge interest in it from Olomouc residents,” re-

calls Jiří Slavík, a long-time AFO programmer who also contributed to a unique publication for this year’s anniversary, after literally rummaging through many boxes of clippings, documents, and photographs.

## Science films vs films about science

Those with long memories may recall that if someone somewhere in the last century came across a film about science or scientists (usually by mistake), there were always microscopes, white lab coats, or shots of conference rooms where the discussions would bore you to death. AFO’s beginnings were no different. “For many years, medical films dominated at AFO. They were often nothing but filmed recordings of various operations. Nevertheless, there was also room for other themes, and one could say that until the revolution, AFO had three pillars: medical, natural science, and social science films,” explained Slavík.

The fact that the times before 1989 were “black and white” did not stop interesting film industry personalities from coming to Olomouc as festival guests. AFO proper began in 1966, and thanks to the gradual easing of the social situation, Czech directors who were later blacklisted such as Evald Schorm and Karel Vachek were in attendance. “In the 1970s and 1980s, a whole new generation of documentary filmmakers including Helena Třeštková, Olga Sommerová, and Pavel Koutecký got their starts at AFO and won prizes,” said Slavík. →

## Prize-winning films at AFO 60

The jury of the International Competition chose the film **Turtle Walker** as Best International Popular Science film. A portrait of the Indian turtle researcher Satish Bhaskar, it is a fascinating study of scientific enthusiasm, curiosity, and discovery. ■ First Prize for Science Communication went to the Canadian film **Animal Pride**. ■ The prize for Best Czech & Slovak film went to Zuzana Piušová’s documentary **The Scent Trail**. ■ The winner of the Short Film Competition was **Wetlands – Life Blood**. ■ The Best Immersive Work Award went to the augmented reality project **Turbulence: Jamais Vu**. ■ The Audience Award went to **The Kratom Collectors**. ■ The company Sandbox Films awarded the best projects participating in the Camp 4Science programme: top prize and USD 25,000 went to **The Archipelago** project for its powerful coming-of-age story. ■ The Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Popularisation of Science was presented by AFO to the podcast **Radiolab**, which consistently delivers powerful science stories, inspiring the scientific community around the world with its unique approach.

### New beginnings... or The End?

Autumn 1989 marked a sea change in Czechoslovak society. One-party rule collapsed and culture blossomed – books by previously banned authors were published in massive print runs, and “vault films” – Czech films banned by the previous regime – were shown again, or even for the first time. It looked as though AFO would also have a promising future ahead of it – that the existential problems the festival began to face in the late 1980s would soon disappear. “By the end of the 1980s the festival had pretty much stagnated, and after the revolution, the question arose as to who would finance it, because the money just wasn’t there. They were even considering whether it would be simply better to end it. Luckily, AFO had the support of then rector Josef Jařab, and somehow managed to adapt to the new conditions and find the means and a model how to keep the festival running. But the first half of the nineties were truly tough. Jařab was not afraid of constructive criticism, and also helped the festival with his foreign contacts, thanks to which guests from the West began to arrive. And so it has continued, uninterrupted, to this day,” Slavík said of the indispensable role of the first freely-elected rector of UP.

### AFO 61...

The new history of AFO has begun to be written. It incorporates the mass energy and enthusiasm of several generations

of organisers and of student engagement, winning over the public including viewers from abroad, as well as sponsors and partners. And AFO has become a social phenomenon. Not only does it show that science is beneficial and can even be fun or sexy, but it reminds us that it is important to care about the world we live in, because we can be its co-creators, or at least its co-preservers. It offers space for discussions, is open to all opinions, and reflects current social issues and trends. It’s not just nerds with microscopes anymore. AFO is a splendid example of how Palacký University completely fulfils the “third mission” of universities: service to society.

And what will AFO 61, 62, and 63 look like? Eva Navrátilová, current AFO director, is clear. “I am convinced that thanks to the constant generational change with the arrival of new students every year on the organising team, there’s no chance the festival will stagnate, and thanks to them its atmosphere will always be exceptional. At the same time, we strive to be open to innovation, we do not want to rest on our laurels, but continue to evolve. Proof of that this year was the newly-created competition section Immersive Media, as well as the festival’s subtitle ‘work in progress’. We perceive the festival’s organisation as a never-ending work in progress, and every year we are sure the next edition could be even better. We’re working on it!” she promised. You can see for yourself next April.



### A unique “book” reveals the colourful history of the Academia Film Olomouc Festival

Academia Film Olomouc: 60 Years of Popular Science Films (AFO60) is the title of a unique, bilingual publication summarising 60 years of the festival’s existence, a colourful chronicle, and an artistic collector’s item all in one. The “book”, in the form of a designer ring-binder folio, offers interviews, a history, essays, an extensive photo album, as well as a designer postcard, a special badge, and a double-sided poster. The publication is a joint project by the current creative team at AFO, Palacký University Press, and award-winning graphic designer Radim Měsíc. AFO60 covers all three inseparable levels of the festival – the present, past, and the social intersections. In separately printed detachable items in different formats, it presents a readable, detailed history of AFO from its beginnings to the present day, an extensive photo album full of archival images throughout all its years, interviews with former AFO directors and members of the organising team who helped shape the face of the current festival, essay contributions by the current AFO creative team, and other bonuses. The book was published with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, the City of Olomouc, and the Czech Audiovisual Fund, and is available at Palacký University Press’s e-shop.





8 faculties  
1 university



## Dance party with lecturers from all over the world at the Faculty of Physical Culture

The UP Faculty of Physical Culture danced to the rhythm of the 25th International Teaching Week. During the mostly practical lessons led by both foreign and local lecturers, students could try Latin, Irish, and Croatian folk dances, as well as street dance; they could also take dance classes focused on self-discovery.

“We wanted to offer the widest possible variety of dance styles and approaches, but we did not neglect the academic approach, so the programme also included theoretical lectures,” said Michal Kudláček, Vice-Dean for International Relations.

Eleven lecturers, some from Canada, Israel, Romania, and Spain, danced along with the participants. Among them was Shira Robbins from Levinsky-Wingate Academic College, Israel, who is somewhat to credit for the dance week at the faculty. “She was our guest back in 2022, and her drive and approach to dance was so inspiring that we started to pursue the idea of International Dancing Week. However, due to the organisational demands, the idea needed to mature,” said Markéta Kudláčková on behalf of the organisers from the International Relations Office.

The programme was greatly appreciated by students and faculty staff. Dance students even asked Janita Frantsi from the University of Alberta, Canada, who presented her dance research project, for an extra workshop. “I loved the opportunity to not only try out new dance styles, but also experience the atmosphere and cultures of international experts. I took classes in Irish dance, contemporary dance, life dance, and salsa, enjoying them all. It was great to try something new, and I hope that a similar opportunity will come up in the future,” said Recreation student Kateřina Jenisová. (vim)

## Irish Corner at Palacký University



The Irish Corner was inaugurated in the library of the Department of English and American Studies at the UP Faculty of Arts (UP FA) in the presence of the Ambassador of Ireland, Alan Gibbons. It serves all UP students interested in Irish culture and language.

“We are indebted to the many countries that support the teaching of their languages and literatures at our faculty. Ambassador Gibbons has assured us of his long-term support, and we are very grateful for that,” said FA Dean Jan Stejskal. He added that Gibbons has promised, in addition to books, to expand cooperation with several Irish universities.

The opening of the Irish Corner at UP was discussed during the Ambassa-

dor's visit to Olomouc last year. “Irish studies have been taught here almost since the Velvet Revolution. First by Mike Stoddart, then by Matthew Sweney. And for nearly two decades, UP FA has offered courses in Irish led by Radvan Markus, the leading Czech expert on Irish,” said David Livingstone from the Department of English and American Studies.

During the opening ceremony, the Ambassador of Ireland was accompanied by the Deputy Head of Mission, Eadaoin O'Connor. The event was also attended by Dr Markus, who concluded the ceremony with a lecture on contemporary Irish literature and his own award-winning translations from Irish into Czech. (map)



## Mediated society: Faculty of Theology focuses on conspiracy theories

Why do people believe conspiracy theories? This question is being addressed by researchers from the UP Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology (UP CMFT) as part of the Mediated Society project, which reflects on the rapid development of technology and its impact on life. Experts from Masaryk University in Brno and the Brno University of Technology are also participating in the four-year project of the Czech Academy of Sciences Institute of Psychology, funded by the Johannes Amos Comenius Operational Programme.

Researchers want to deepen understanding of the processes involved in working with information at the individual, social, and societal levels from the perspective of social sciences and the humanities, such as psychology, political science, pedagogy, and theology, in cooperation with computer science. The starting point

is the recognition that human psychological processes are controlled and shaped in interaction with other people who mediate the world and society. Interactions in digital environments, however, are increasingly becoming part of life. Thus, experts are focusing, among other things, on exploring the impacts of AI and the changes in the cognitive, social, and affective competences of individuals and groups that may result from such interactions.

Researchers from the Olomouc University Social Health Institute (OUSHI) at UP CMFT focus on conspiracy theories in the context of religiosity and spirituality. “The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of public discourse and to identify factors contributing to belief in such theories. This research project builds on our long-standing activity in this area. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we conducted several data collections, which



we are still evaluating, and publishing our findings. However, we are not only looking at conspiracies that focus on vaccination and the virus’s origin, but also at other emerging issues such as modern technology and political narratives regarding the war in Ukraine,” said OUSHI Director Peter Tavel, adding that results will be published in impact journals. (vim)

## Faculty of Health Sciences nominated for a prestigious award

The UP Faculty of Health Sciences (UP FHS) has achieved success in the field of international cooperation and education. The Radiology English Across Borders project within the Aktion programme was nominated for the 2024 Czech National Agency for International Education and Research (DZS) Awards in the Internationalisation category. The winners were announced in March in Prague’s Rudolfinum. The project was also included in the DZS 2024 annual publication.

“The nomination for this prestigious award is proof that even a relatively small project can have a significant impact and be unique in its field. What is most beneficial about the project is that it is one of the few international activities and mobility opportunities in the Radiological Assistant programme,” said the project’s principal investigator, Lukáš Merz from the UP FHS Department of Humanities and Social Sciences.

The project Radiology English Across Borders brought together students of

Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes in radiological technology from Olomouc and Wiener Neustadt, Austria. The aim was to improve the students’ professional communication skills in English and support their professional development. The project took place in four phases.

The initial introduction at the faculty was followed by a practical workshop led by Hana Sobotková and Desirée Verdonk and a visit to the Department of Radiology at University Hospital Olomouc guided by radiology assistance graduates. Afterwards, students worked on tasks and viewed instructional videos. The final phase, which took place in Austria, included model situations in a simulated environment and an excursion to the MedAustron proton centre, specialising in cancer treatment and research.

“The most interesting aspect was perhaps the confrontation of educational methods and environment between Olomouc and our Austrian partner,” noted Merz, adding that the project could be continued. “Based on the possibilities of the partner institution, we are considering the inclusion of occupational therapy or physiotherapy in the future.” (dkr)



8 faculties  
1 university



## Thirty and sixty years since graduation: Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry welcomed its alumni back

Alumni from all over Czechia, as well as Slovakia, Germany, and the United States, returned to the UP Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry (UP FMD) in the spring. While the Radicés/Roots meeting brought together physicians who graduated in 1995, participants of the Diamond Graduation came to reminisce about their studies sixty years ago.

Dr Bohdan Pomahač and his wife Hana travelled from the USA to attend Roots, where 154 former students met. “The trip was definitely worth it, as we haven’t seen some of them in thirty years. Such a meeting is precious. Now we are all in our prime, who knows if we’ll be able to meet like this again forty or fifty years from now.”

ty years after graduation,” said the famous plastic surgeon and a UP doctor honoris causa. His wife, who was attracted to ophthalmology and now is pursuing fine arts, added, “It’s fantastic, we’re happy to be here. When I see the faces of our classmates, it completely energises me and brings back the time we studied here.” Both marvelled at how the faculty has transformed since their graduation. “It’s making progress for sure,” Dr Poma- hač said.

The faculty's modern facilities also served as the backdrop for the Diamond Graduation Ceremony, where 33 graduates from 1965 received their commemorative diplomas. Among them were neu-

rologist Zbyněk Kalita, who helped launch the National Programme for the Care of Stroke Patients, Helena Vavrková, who, in addition to taking care of patients and teaching at the UP FMD 3rd Department of Internal Medicine and University Hospital Olomouc, also specialised in atherosclerosis and lipid metabolism disorders, and Marie Štefková, who still teaches orthodontics. “We recall with respect and gratitude our teachers who greatly contributed to how we managed not only our studies but also our professional lives. Many of them have also been our moral role models,” she said in a short speech after taking the solemn graduation vow once again. (vim)

## Faculty of Education launched a new “care” portal

A new platform of the UP Faculty of Education (UP FE) entitled “I take care of myself... and my pupils” serves as a methodological support for schools. The faculty has also launched thematic social media accounts, through which it publishes examples of didactic resources, and more.



The new UP FE portal is designed for teachers who want to introduce topics related to mental hygiene, well-being, and mental health support for pupils into teaching at schools. This issue is increasingly relevant in the context of reports on the frequency of mental health problems among adolescents. From 2025, well-being is also part of the official curriculum for primary education. This is also why the portal offers a wide range of freely available methodological materials, publications, and teaching aids, including a free downloadable library. Members of the UP FE Department of Psychology and Pathopsychology as well as external and foreign specialists contributed to its creation.

“We have been working on the issue of well-being and mental health at the facul-

ty for several years now,” said UP FE Vice-Dean Petra Šobánová, under whose leadership the team works. She also mentioned the organisation of experiential workshops. “We have prepared new materials for journaling and self-knowledge, and earlier a set of projective cards that help to perceive and visualise emotions. The cards, in their entirety, form a rich colour palette and help one to become aware of their momentary emotions – including those that are difficult to express in words. And how do we use them? We focus on our current emotion, inner state, or mood – and then choose the card that best expresses that emotion. We are continuously adding some of these cards to the project’s social networks,” concluded the UP FE Vice-Dean. (map)



## Comprehensive renovation of the Faculty of Law's main building has begun

The UP Faculty of Law (UP FL) has handed over Building A to a construction company. The building from the 1970s will undergo a comprehensive renovation. The faculty will thus obtain new premises and modern facilities for students and staff. The renovated building is scheduled to reopen in September 2026.

“The aim of the renovation is to completely modernise the entire building. We expect to improve working conditions for our employees and modernise teaching spaces. There will be new air-conditioning and electrical wiring, and the number of toilets will be significantly expanded. All floors will be newly connected by a lift, which will facilitate access,” said Rector Michael Kohajda, who was in charge of investments as UP FL Vice-Dean.

In addition, the building will be enlarged by a multi-purpose extension above the current rotunda. “We will gain additional teaching space, and conferences and scholarly board meetings could be held

there,” Kohajda suggested. There will also be a new and significantly larger space for the international office, which will be able to better serve the students. “All administrative staff will have better working conditions,” he added.

The management of the faculty is pleased that after a long period of planning and preparation, it has been possible to hand over Building A to a construction company. “Thanks belong to the architectural firm, the team at the faculty, and the Rector's Office – all our colleagues who prepared the rebuilding. We all wish the construction goes well with minimal complications. To the staff and students, thank you for your patience. The closing of Building A entailed moving everyone into one building and partially limiting our functioning,” said UP FL Dean Václav Stehlík.

The estimated cost of the renovation was €4 million excluding VAT, but a successful tender managed to reduce the price to just €3 million. The faculty will use the



subsidy it received from the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to finance the project, with about one fifth of the cost covered from its own resources.

The renovation, which will be carried out until summer 2026, will be undertaken by the Brno company ESOX. (eha)

## Faculty of Science students plant Academic Orchard

Slatinky near Prostějov boasts a new Academic Orchard. Dozens of fruit trees, selected with respect to the local climate and soil, were planted in this village at the end of February by students of the UP Faculty of Science (UP FS) together with local residents.

The design of the planting of fruit trees and vines is a nod to the former extensive orchards in the Malý Kosíř Hill area. The idea to establish the Academic Orchard in Slatinky came from a landscape workshop

regularly organised by the Department of Landscape Planning at the Mendel University Faculty of Horticulture in Lednice and the UP FS Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences.

“In 2020 and 2024, two workshops were organised in Slatinky. At these workshops, students solved various problems in the inner and outer areas of the village. They focused on the drainage conditions at the Kobylí Hlava Boulder area, the protected areas

of the Kosíř Quarries national nature monument, and the agricultural land in the vicinity. The students also paid attention to a long-term problem of Slatinky, which is visitor parking,” said the head of the Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences Bořivoj Šarapatka, who together with Alena Salašová was the guarantor of the project.

“We named it Academic Orchard because students from Palacký University and Mendel University were involved. The strategic location near Kosíř Hill offers a unique opportunity to create a relaxation zone and an educational space,” added Monika Prokopová, the mayor of Slatinky.

Heritage and regional varieties of pear, apple, cherry, plum, and sour cherry trees were chosen for planting, taking into account the local climate, soil, and habitat. “An interesting regional variety is Dobrá bílá [Good White Cherry]. Its yellowish colour makes it unattractive to starlings and other birds. Of the pears, the variety Velká krvavka [Big Bloody] is sure to attract attention by its red flesh,” said Zdeněk Špišek from the UP FS Department of Chemical Biology, who supervised the planting. (cho)



# Fascinated by how materials science is changing our view of biology

Interdisciplinary science – a description that fits Sagar Sanjay Arya's research like a glove. Thanks to the support of MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships, he combines biology and materials science at Palacký University's CATRIN, the Czech Advanced technology and Research Institute. The aim is to contribute to solving global challenges, such as the impact of climate change on crops.

“My research focuses on bioengineering, nanomaterials, biosensors, and plant-environment interactions. At CATRIN, I want to further explore how plants respond to climatic and nutritional changes through electrical signals. I also want to develop new, nature-inspired sensors for environmental monitoring – both on Earth and in extra-terrestrial conditions,” said the researcher, who is originally from India and has also worked in Australia and the United Arab Emirates, gaining experience in both academic and commercial environments.

He has been working at Palacký University since the end of last year. “I chose

CATRIN because of its reputation for cutting-edge research in bioengineering, nanotechnology, and plant phenotyping. Another big incentive was the opportunity to collaborate with scientists such as Lukáš Spíchal and Radek Zbořil, whose work in plant phenotyping and nanomaterial-based catalysis I've long admired. CATRIN is a very supportive and collaborative environment with an interdisciplinary background and state-of-the-art equipment, which fits in perfectly with my plans and ambitions,” he added. He would like to build on his previous work and link laboratory results to global needs. Whether it's using biohybrid nanomaterials to fight bacterial infections, developing platforms for testing antimicrobial activity, or developing nanomaterials that can trigger plant defence mechanisms for sustainable agriculture on a larger scale.

He is fascinated by the interconnection between biology and materials science. “It's amazing that we can use biocompat-

ible materials, nanotechnology, and 3D printing to interact with complex biological systems with incredible precision. Nanomaterials can penetrate cells, deliver drugs, and monitor molecular events, allowing us to better understand cellular processes. Thanks to advanced imaging technologies, we can see biological structures down to the atomic level. It's amazing how deeply we can penetrate the very essence of life,” says the young researcher.

He considers last year's Young Academic Award from the European Membrane Society to be one of his greatest achievements to date, but he is also pleased that the results of his work are being used by farmers in Spain to increase grapevine yields. “In reality, my greatest achievement are the inspiring people around me. They have supported me in difficult times and continue to motivate me to this day – especially the mentors from my PhD and postdoctoral internships, my family, and friends. I'm so lucky to have them.”







text: Šárka Chovancová  
photo: Ladislav Chytka

science

# Faculty of Science experts help construct giant system of 60 telescopes in Spain and Chile

Experts from the Joint Laboratory of Optics, a joint workplace of Palacký University and the Institute of Physics of the Czech Academy of Sciences, the Astronomical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, and Charles University, are significantly involved in the upcoming construction of a system of more than 60 telescopes in Spain and Chile. Czech scientists and technicians ensured the production of high-precision mirrors and various moving parts of the telescopes. The international collaboration will create the world's most powerful observatory for gamma-ray astronomy, which will help scientists tackle complex astrophysics questions.

Scientists will use the system of telescopes to obtain more information on black holes, search for dark matter, deviations from Einstein's Theory of Relativity, and try to understand the origin and role of cosmic particles.

"The main contributions of the Czech partners in this project lie in the development of technology, professional expertise, and the production of key components. Czech scientists and engineers have been

involved in the design and construction of components of large-sized telescopes (LST), which cover the lower energy spectrum of gamma rays. Our contribution included the development of systems focused on optics, mechanics, and control of the telescopes, and the Czech Republic has had and will have a significant share – especially in the optical components," said Miroslav Pech from the Joint Laboratory of Optics.

Czech experts also participated in the development and testing of small-sized telescopes (SST-1M) designed to observe gamma-ray astrophysics at very high energies. The Czech team focused on optical calibration and innovations in the design and assembly of these telescopes. Czechs contributed by manufacturing precision optical elements, such as mirrors and other optical systems that meet the highest requirements for surface quality and reflectivity.

Scientists in Czech laboratories also focused on the development of thin optical layers, preparation of mirror surfaces, characterisation methodology and measurement mechanisms of optical elements. In addition, they have provided expert capac-

ities for testing and certification of components in the fields of optics, mechanics, and electronics. They have also made important contributions in the field of atmospheric monitoring, crucial for the correct interpretation of gamma-ray measurements, and in the selection of candidate sites for the construction of the observatory.

"The production of mirrors, mechanical components and other key technologies developed in the Czech Republic meet the strict requirements for stability and precision in extreme conditions. The Czech contribution to the development of optical systems and technologies for the SST-1M and LST telescopes was essential for the implementation of the CTA project on the global level," noted Pech.

The Cherenkov Telescope Array Observatory is intended to be the largest and most powerful gamma-ray astronomy observatory in the world, with an energy range of (20 GeV – 300 TeV). To cover the wide energy range, CTAO will use three types of telescopes: large-sized telescopes (LST), medium-sized telescopes (MST), and small-sized telescopes (SST).

# Even routine blood tests can be useful in treating advanced prostate cancer

Prostate cancer is the second most common cause of death in men and is still in many ways a mysterious disease that doctors and scientists are trying to “get to the bottom of”. Eva Chrenková has also contributed to the effort. During her doctoral studies, led by Jan Bouchal from the UP Faculty of Medicine Department of Clinical and Molecular Pathology, she was interested in whether blood samples from patients with advanced stage prostate cancer could be used to improve their care.

Although there have been great gains made in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer recently, the challenge for experts is resistance to the usual therapeutic approaches, when the tumour adapts to treatment and then can grow and metastasise. Important information for deciding on how to best tune and tailor further treatment could be provided by a patient's blood sample analysis.

“We wanted to take into account the individuality of each patient and their specific tumour. We chose the method of fluid biopsy, i.e. the collection of a bodily fluid and its subsequent molecular analysis. We collected samples from patients with advanced

prostate cancer at the UP Faculty of Medicine Department of Oncology and University Hospital Olomouc before the start of therapy and every three months thereafter. After isolating free DNA and RNA molecules from blood plasma, we analysed for the presence of certain markers related to the development of metastases or failure of previous treatment. Such markers include amplification of the gene for the androgen receptor on which androgen receptor pathway inhibitor (ARPI) treatment focuses, or increased production of miRNA-375, which is associated with the presence of metastases and correlates with the failure of ARPI therapy,” Chrenková explained.

They collected repeat samples from 330 patients. Over one thousand samples were further studied for deeper understanding of prostate cancer biology. “We also took into account signs of inflammation and the general health of the patient such as CRP, platelets, lymphocytes, monocytes, and other white blood cells and their ratios. These are commonly tested for in hospitals and doctors have that data at their disposal. At the same time, we

managed to determine that platelet levels and some other indicators can be used to estimate patient survival and provide additional information on how the patient will probably respond to treatment.”

The UP Endowment Fund has also taken an interest in her work. Thanks to its support, she established cooperation with the Juliana Winkler research group at the Medical University of Vienna, which she recently joined as a postdoctoral researcher, even before defending her dissertation. “The UP Endowment Fund concept is excellent. Thanks to the fund, I was able to go on a foreign internship, expand my knowledge about metastases at the cellular level, and also contribute to their research in the other hormone-dependent tumour – breast cancer. The project I am currently working on in Vienna focuses on why metastases occur as they do and what role non-tumour cells play in this. It is not a direct continuation of my dissertation, but rather a natural shift from the markers associated with tumour development to the research of the biology behind them,” the young scientist added.



Eva Chrenková also received the UP Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry's Dean's Award for her work, including an article published in *Frontiers in Oncology*. “We tried to raise awareness of why fluid biopsy is an important technique in treating prostate cancer, why to pay attention to it, and how the professional public can use it in practice,” she said.



text: Milada Křížková Hronová  
photos: Jakub Čermák

portrait

# Veronika Růžičková:

You would be amazed at  
what blind people can learn

“An asteroid is hurtling towards Earth, threatening to destroy it. Ten people are being selected who could save humanity. Try to come up with a profession that would get you into the selected group.” This was the assignment given to Veronika Růžicková, a teaching assistant at the Institute of Special Education Studies at Palacký University’s Faculty of Education (UP FE), during one of her earlier courses. How did she respond? “I didn’t try to come up with anything and told the teacher: I’m a special educator, and if ten people fly into deep space, we’ll soon be very dependent on each other. Special education is incredibly diverse; it means working with people. And so I was selected.”

A special educator, educator of the visually impaired, vision therapist, and spatial orientation instructor. She is also a laureate of the Magister Optimus Award for pedagogical work at UP FE and the UP Rector’s Award. She had always dreamed of studying special education and learned sign language at secondary school. As a student there, Růžicková thought she would work with people with hearing impairments, i.e. in deaf education. However, when choosing her university studies, she changed her mind and decided to dedicate herself to working with people with visual impairments. After graduating, she began working at the faculty, and later also with visually impaired students at the then UP Centre for the Support of Persons with Disabilities.

Her professional path toward becoming a vision therapist required further study, this time at the Faculty of Humanities at Charles University in Prague, where a course in spatial orientation was offered. Out of the ten participants, only one other completed the course. At that time, she was only a few years away from being offered a position as a vision therapist at one of the eye clinics in Olomouc.

“Vision therapists are classified as non-medical personnel in healthcare here. There are about forty of us in the Czech Republic, i.e. very few. We are special educators with a degree in educating the visually impaired who have also completed a post-graduate certification course in vision therapy. As persons whose work is closely related to healthcare, I think we should also have the opportunity to work in the social sector as well as in education,” adds Růžicková, who is also the chair of the Association of Vision Therapists.

According to her, the scope of vision therapy in the Czech Republic is very broad.

“On one hand, our work deals with functional vision testing, examining children or adults who are difficult to examine using conventional methods. On the other hand, we teach people to use their existing visual functions to the highest extent possible. Of course, this job is best conducted in a team consisting of an ophthalmologist, vision therapist, orthoptist, and optometrist, with a whole range of aids. Various approaches and procedures are practiced, and timely intervention is essential. I must emphasise that not everything can be remedied. In some cases, it’s necessary to focus on spatial orientation, i.e. teaching a person to use a white cane and read Braille.”

Her day seems to have more than 24 hours. It seems there is nothing she cannot achieve, nothing that is impossible for her. Some time ago, she was awarded the Magister Optimus Award for her teaching activities at her home faculty, and recently, together with Alena Vondráková from the Department of Geoinformatics at the UP Faculty of Science and a team of authors, she also received the UP Rector’s Award for a publication on the subject of aids for teaching the visually impaired. These are 3D models with auditory elements which serve to develop the imagination of people with severe visual impairments.

“We can use our imagination in various ways. However, it always depends on how we train a person with severe visual impairment or blindness and how that person then works on themselves. You would be amazed at what blind people can learn. For example, before visiting Buchlov Castle, they can read materials about it and find out what is located there. Once they have a 3D model of the building in their hands, they know exactly what it’s all about. When they examine the model in detail with their hands and connect the obtained image with what the tactile aid has offered them, they gain the complete picture. They ‘see’ the building spatially. People with severe visual impairments often have a more developed memory and use their imagination differently. If they have good educational materials and experience, they can then describe a building in great detail.”

Růžicková mentioned Buchlov Castle for a good reason. It is one of those exemplary places which are well-prepared for visitors with visual impairments.

“The tour there allows people with severe visual impairments to explore the

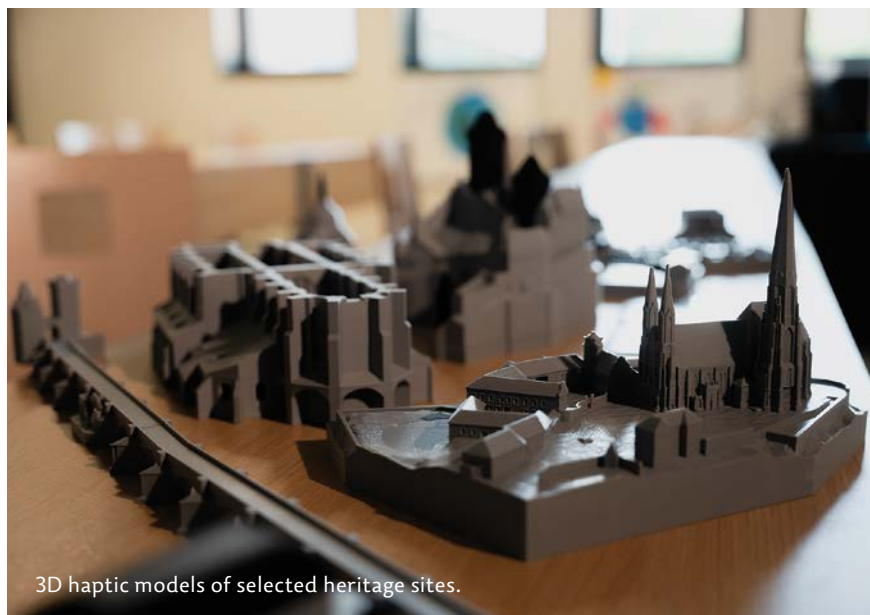


#### **Veronika Růžicková (b. 1980)**

She studied teaching and special education at the Palacký University Olomouc Faculty of Education, then public administration law at the UP Faculty of Law. She completed courses in spatial orientation instruction (Faculty of Humanities, Charles University) and visual therapy (Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education). Since graduating, she has worked at the UP FE Institute of Special Education Studies, where she trains special education teachers specialising in the visually impaired. She also works as a special educator for the visually impaired at the Special Education Centre (SPC) Olomouc and as a vision therapist at an eye clinic. She is the principal investigator of two Technology Agency of the Czech Republic projects and the author or co-author of dozens of professional publications. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her family, travelling, sport, literature, and sleeping.



“Visual therapy is best conducted in a team consisting of an ophthalmologist, vision therapist, orthoptist, and optometrist, with a whole range of aids.”



3D haptic models of selected heritage sites.

space and touch selected objects, such as swords, armour, and historical clothing. In Olomouc, I would recommend the Archdiocesan Museum and the Archbishop's Palace, which have items specifically designated for the visually impaired. These sites also have guides, often students of special education for the visually impaired, who know how to guide blind visitors. Although the range of options for the visually impaired and the blind in this country is expanding, we still have a lot to learn. A good example is Italy, where the town of Bari offers tours with 3D models and various soundscapes. Such a tour, during which I could listen to the hustle and bustle of the market, was interesting even for me as a person without visual impairment. The will and desire to help is more decisive than finances.”

It would seem that nothing else could fit into Růžicková's time and space. Not true – in addition to spending her free time with her children, reading books, and travelling, new challenges are already emerging. She would love to become an associate professor – and would like to be part of discussions on changes in the education of vision therapists.

“I've always been lucky, both with regard to my colleagues and teachers, as well as having a job which fulfils me. Teaching complements practice perfectly. Working at UP FE, cooperating with colleagues and students, is a source of energy and satisfaction for me. It is also a place of encounters that I greatly appreciate, a place where I myself am constantly learning.”



**Veronika Vachalová**

UP FE Department of Special Education Studies

For me, Veronika is the embodiment of a superwoman, whose pace is sometimes beyond belief. When she does something, she puts her whole heart and soul into it, her enthusiasm is literally contagious. She is inspiring, extremely capable, and above all, a person who makes everyone feel that nothing is impossible. Our teacher-student relationship, when she was my supervisor during my doctoral studies, gradually changed. She became my colleague and, most importantly my friend, for which I am extremely grateful. I have had the honour of working with her on many successful and meaningful projects, and I've always been fascinated by the precision, passion, and determination with which she approaches everything. We also share a part of our lives outside the office, so I know that she is not only a great colleague, but also an amazing and loving mother who can handle anything with love and grace. Veronika is a truly inspiring role model.



**Alena Vondráková**

Department of Geoinformatics, UP Faculty of Science

Veronika is not only my dear colleague, but for more than 15 years since we first met over maps for the visually impaired, she is also a great friend. One of her colleagues says that she's the best in her field in the country. I believe it! At the same time, I've no idea how she manages to do it all. She has so many work activities! And she still manages to be a great mom to her daughters and a friend who's always there for you. Her research makes the world a better place for people with visual impairments; her personality makes the world a much better place for all of us.



## To Nebraska for a year to study outer space law and improve her English

The UP Faculty of Law knows who to send to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) for a year-long study stay. Nikol Doležalová, a second-year student of the Master's programme Law and Legal Studies, won the two-round selection procedure.

This is the first-ever opportunity for an Olomouc law student to travel abroad thanks to the support of Palacký University and a Robitschek Foundation scholarship. Studies in Nebraska start in

August. “When I learned about the possibility of studying in America, I knew right away I had to give it a try. I hesitated just a moment because one year is a long time and I’m happy here in Olomouc,” says the twenty-one-year-old student. Although she is only in her second year, she has already picked an area of law close to her heart. “I’m enthused about international law. I’m convinced that one day it will play an important role in my career path, too.” She thus hopes to deepen her legal

knowledge in this area at UNL. “I first sought out information about the school to see if it’d be right for me. The opportunity to learn from Prof Jack M. Beard, an expert in outer space law, cyber law, and national security, and from Prof Kristen Blankley, an expert in alternative dispute resolution, will be invaluable to me,” says Nikol. “I’d also like to improve my English level to C2,” adds the student, who also speaks German, Russian, and is learning Spanish. (eha)

## Olomouc City Awards to Klára Marešová and Jakub Jurka

Klára Marešová, Head of the Department of Ophthalmology at the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry (FMD) and Universi-



ty Hospital Olomouc (UHO), and Jakub Jurka, a fencer and Olympic medallist who studies at the UP Faculty of Physical Culture, have received the Olomouc City Award, granted by the Town Hall as an expression of appreciation for significant activities of personalities associated with Olomouc.

Klára Marešová, who has twice been ranked by *Forbes* magazine among the 50 best doctors in the Czech Republic, was awarded in the category Science and Research. The Olomouc ophthalmologist with Brno roots specialises in cataract and glaucoma surgery, plastic surgery, and ultrasound. She studied medicine at FMD, graduating in 1990. She has been working at the FMD Department of Ophthalmology and UHO since 1998, being a senior doctor there and then its head

since 2019. She is the author of 19 professional publications and has given more than two hundred lectures; she is also the chair of the Czech Society of Ophthalmology. Her grandfather, Jan Vanýsek, professor of ophthalmology and Masaryk University rector, introduced her to ophthalmology.

The city’s award in the category Sport was given to fencer Jakub Jurka, whose extraordinary performance secured the Czech team a bronze medal at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris. The Dukla Olomouc fencer would like to build on this success in three years in Los Angeles and then plans to take part in two more Olympics. Recently, he has received the Olomouc Area and the Olomouc Region Sportsman of the Year awards, as well as the UP Rector’s Award. (vim)



## Bader Scholarship for Alena Havlíková, UP Faculty of Arts PhD student

This year, the highly prestigious scholarship of the American chemist and art collector Alfred Bader was awarded to Alena Havlíková, a student of the PhD programme Theory and History of Fine Arts at the UP Faculty of Arts (FA). She received the scholarship to support her scientific activities and for a stay abroad.

The annual scholarship from the Isabella & Alfred Bader Fund enables three top PhD students to carry out their research projects. Art and architecture historian Havlíková, a PhD student at the FA Department of Art History, will use it to finance a study stay in the USA, where she will work on a project entitled “Students of the Adolf Loos School and their American Experience”. “The scholarship is a great honour

for me and a confirmation of the potential of my research project, in which I am focusing on a number of contexts related to the Loos School. His school represents a unique phenomenon in the history of architecture that remains underexplored – especially in terms of its influence on students and their experience in the American environment. The fellowship will allow me to take my research to a new level, to explore the primary sources of Loos’s followers, to validate Loos’s concepts in a broader international context, and to expand my understanding of his educational legacy. I perceive it as a commitment not only to my field, but also to my colleagues who are examining Loos’s legacy,” said Havlíková. She will travel to the USA in the autumn. (map)



## Faculty of Science Dean's Award Student Scientific Competition won by Věra Kafková

A total of 133 entries were submitted to the Dean's Award Student Scientific Competition organised by the Faculty of Science with the support of Teva Czech Industries and Tapi Czech Industries. Students presented their works in mathematics and computer science, chemistry, physics, biology, ecology and the environment, didactics of natural sciences, and earth sciences in the Bachelor's, Master's, and doctoral

categories before an expert jury. The competition also included a poster section. The overall winner was Věra Kafková with her work entitled “Adventive Flora of the Wider Olomouc Town Centre”.

“I was hoping a bit to reach the podium, but becoming the overall winner was beyond my wildest dreams. In my thesis I focused on the distribution of non-native and endangered plant species in the

wider town centre of Olomouc. I'd like to thank my supervisor, Dr Michal Hroneš from the Department of Botany, without whom this thesis wouldn't have been possible,” said Kafková, a student of Biology and Ecology.

The most represented sections were once again Chemistry and Biology, Ecology & Environment. “The judges were faced with a difficult task to choose the winner,” said the Vice-Dean for Student Affairs, Jan Říha.

The winners of the individual sections of the 22nd edition were Filip Martiník in Mathematics & Computer Science, Markéta Camfrlová in Chemistry, Martin Dostál in Physics, Věra Kafková in Biology, Ecology & Environment, Nikolaus Gernot in Earth Sciences, Kateřina Machancová in Didactics of Natural Sciences, and Anežka Dostálová in the Poster Section.

The Dean's Award Student Scientific Competition has been organised by the UP Faculty of Science in its current form since 2007. The competition continues the long tradition of student scientific and academic activities. The aim of the competition is to motivate students to actively participate in science and research and to pursue further their research and investigations. (cho)



# Faculty of Theology student awarded for promotion of the Czech Republic

Matěj Plechl, a student of the UP Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology (CMFT), was awarded for his efforts in promoting the Czech Republic, its culture, and traditions abroad. He has been involved in the activities of Czech-American TV (CATVUSA), contributing significantly to the production of thematic Czech language lessons.

"I never dreamed that my work would ever make it to the U.S.," said the student of the Ethics and Culture in Media Communication study programme, who edited and also partially animated the opening four Czech lessons of the upcoming 200-part series. Its aim is to help English-speaking students learn Czech and introduce Czech traditions and cultural highlights. The first lessons were about Easter and the differences between Czech and English. In addition, the student also worked on a video manual that would assist his followers with the creation of further episodes.

"Cooperation with CATVUSA was a great opportunity for me to connect my knowledge with real practice. Not only did I get to try my hand at working on actual media projects, but I also had the opportunity to participate in the promotion of Czech culture, which was meaningful



and enjoyable. I've learnt a lot, and the experience gained will come in handy in the future," he added.

The director of CATVUSA, John Honner, an American producer with Czech roots, praised the collaboration. "Matěj is very skilled, he was already experienced in the required tasks and worked on the project as a true expert," he said in the office

of the CMFT Dean Vít Hušek, where they both thanked the student for his work.

Czech-American TV is a non-commercial television company that has been spreading the good name of the Czech Republic abroad and drawing attention to it as a culturally and touristically interesting country for 22 years through educational programmes in English and more. (vim)

## Michal Ranný Prize for Vladimír Havlík



Performer and conceptual artist Vladimír Havlík from the UP Faculty of Education Department of Art Education received the 2024 Michal Ranný Prize. The award has been given since 1999 by the Friends of the Moravian Gallery in cooperation with the Moravian Gallery in Brno.

The Michal Ranný Prize, established in honour of the memory of this important painter, is intended for artists of all ages and citizenships whose work has fundamentally enriched Czech visual culture. At the same time, it is an appreciation of their influence upon the next generation of artists.

"I'm glad that the award comes from Brno. The influence of the Brno art concept was crucial for me and I took it with me to Olomouc, where I've lived since I was eighteen," said Havlík.

The jury consisted of experts and members of the Friends of the Moravian Gallery, chaired by Terezie Petišková, director of the Brno House of Arts. According to Petišková, there are a number of reasons for awarding Havlík the prize. "His work represents a special, distinctive quality that has been continuously present on the Czech art scene since the early 1990s. He creates abstract paintings, meditative drawings, and computer prints. Most importantly, however, is the performative character of Havlík's work, his subtle, distinctive humour and insight. These aspects synthetically interconnect Havlík's genre-rich activities," she said.

Havlík is the 13th recipient of the Ranný Prize, receiving the award during the presentation of his intervention (A)I Performer at the Pražák Palace. (map)



# INTERMAT to support efficient crop production

The INTERMAT project, led by researchers at the Czech Advanced Technology and Research Institute (CATRIN) of Palacký University in cooperation with commercial partners, is intended to contribute to more efficient cultivation of crops in greenhouses and hydroponic systems, to improve their resilience, and to increase the competitiveness of companies in the region.

Thanks to the support of €2.5 million from the Johannes Amos Comenius Operational Programme in the Intersectoral Cooperation for ITI call, researchers will focus over four years on the preparation and testing of new nanomaterials for plant monitoring, and the development of new, more environmentally friendly growth regulators, for example.

“In previous years, UP research centres have made a number of achievements that have a great chance to be put into practice. Therefore, we have partnered with two innovative companies in the region and will work together to develop new processes and materials with the aim of putting into practice new technologies for intensive and efficient cultivation of crops in greenhouses and hydroponic systems,” said principal investigator Ivo Frébort from CATRIN. The project will also involve the UP Faculty of Science, and the commercial sector is represented by AGRO Haná and Geschur Medical. Together, they will capitalise on the knowledge and previous results from materials research and new carbon materials research developed by scientists at UP. (srd)



# Faculty of Law student Vasyl Kapustej is the winner of the Jan Opletal Prize

Vasyl Kapustej, a graduate of the Law and Legal Science Master's programme at the UP Faculty of Law (FL), has become the winner of the Jan Opletal Prize. He was awarded in the category of Personality Under 30 for civic engagement. The highest student award in the Czech Republic is given

by the Student Chamber of the Council of Higher Education Institutions together with the Díky, že můžeme association [Thanks That We Can].

Last year, the Jan Opletal Prizes were awarded in three categories. In total, 53 personalities were nominated. While still

a student, Kapustej was nominated by FL Dean Václav Stehlík for helping his native Ukraine. Since the beginning of the war, the twenty-nine-year-old lawyer has managed to raise over 10 million crowns, which have been directed to material support for Ukrainian soldiers and civilians. He continues to help, regularly and persistently. “Vasyl is a role model for many of us through his civic engagement and selfless help. I'm very glad that not only our faculty and university, but also the Jan Opletal Prize Evaluation Committee appreciate his work,” said Stehlík.

“I am extremely grateful for the award and accept it with great humility. It belongs to all those who participate in my volunteer activities, including the law faculty. I thank my faculty for their support,” said Kapustej, adding that he highly appreciated the group of nominees he became part of. “I'm very happy that there are so many great people among our students who are following in the footsteps of students Jan Opletal and Jan Palach, symbols of resistance against oppressive regimes,” he added.

The 2024 Jan Opletal Prizes were announced for the twelfth time. Among the nominees, apart from Kapustej, were UP students Kateřina Kaprálová from the UP FL and Simona Konečná from the Faculty of Health Sciences. (eha)



university town

text: (mrk)  
photos: Vojtěch Kmenta

# UPoint celebrated its 10th anniversary



What's the largest Czech university shop? UPoint, the Palacký University shop and information centre on Olomouc's Upper Square. This unique space, inspired by similar English and Scottish uni shops, celebrated the first decade of its existence in April.

"Many people probably see UPoint as just a shop which sells university merch, but in recent years it has also become a prominent information centre and a community space. And it plays an even bigger role in promoting the UP brand, both outside and inside UP. After all, purchases of its selection of quality local and sustainable goods by faculties and other divisions make up more than sixty percent of its turnover,"

said Ondřej Martinek, head of the marketing department.

Visitors celebrated its tenth anniversary on 16 April, when UPoint hosted a wheel of fortune which they could spin to win a free gift with any purchase, a quiz competition, and even a beer tasting of the uni beer BrewHer, specially brewed by a team of female student brewers from their own special hops Pink Boots Blend under the auspices of the Eureka university brewery.

"The tenth anniversary made for the perfect opportunity to look back on the founding and development of UPoint. This is why, in cooperation with former UPoint managers and employees, we prepared an exhibition on the shop's history which in-

cluded reminiscences of the main drivers of UPoint's beginnings, including Petr Bilík, former Vice-Rector for External Relations," added Marie Hanušová, UPoint's shop manager.

Since its inception, UPoint has become not only the uni's 'shop window', but also a much-visited information centre, as well as a model and inspiration for other Czech universities. But in terms of the range of its products, its turnover, the interior design and extent of its premises, UPoint is without peer in the Czech Republic. More than half of the current items on offer are produced in cooperation with local suppliers or UP alumni. Great emphasis is also placed on products' sustainability.



# My dream came true: Journalism student Lucie Brožová

“It was hugely rewarding and inspiring! This study stay was my dream come true. I wanted to experience a different educational system, and I was able to. The stay also allowed me to learn more about American culture. Plus, I could travel – I got to see Washington DC, New York, and Boston, too. And during a trip to Niagara Falls, I took a small side trip into Canada. If you ever wanted to study abroad, go for it!” is what Lucie Brožová, a student of journalism at the UP Faculty of Arts (UP FA), enthusiastically tells her fellow students.

She is describing her experiences from her four-month study stay in the USA, where she got thanks to the Merrill Program, through which UP offers students a semester-long stay at American partner colleges and universities. Lucie chose between two, Coe College and Moravian University, the latter catching her eye at first sight.

“Not only because of its history, which is partially linked to the Czech Republic, but also because it is the sixth oldest university in the United States and the first to admit

women,” explains the UP FA Department of Media and Cultural Studies and Journalism student, adding that the school’s location in Pennsylvania, close to both Philadelphia and New York, was another reason why she made her choice.

Before leaving, she passed through a selection process focused on her motivation for her chosen studies. In the USA, she quickly discovered differences between their and the Czech way of teaching.

“We evaluated activities in class, and how students work on individual tasks. In general, courses placed greater emphasis on ongoing assignments and team projects which students worked on the whole semester. The final grade was the result of work over the entire semester. On the other hand, the tests were easier at Moravian University,” she says, appreciating the complete freedom she had in choosing classes.

“Thanks to the Merrill Program, I was able to focus on courses that I could not study in the Czech Republic and which I believe are useful in my future field. I chose graphic design, marketing, public

speaking, and social media communication. It was also great that the school lent us IT equipment to work on – everyone gets issued a MacBook and iPad, allowing us to work on any sort of project. For me, it was most helpful especially in the graphic design course, where I worked on a project every week. When I left for America, I never thought I would be learning so much in just four months!”

A wealth of experiences and knowledge – that is how Brožová briefly answers the question of what she got out of her semester in the USA. Career-wise, some day she would like to work in a job that involves communication, content creation, and information transfer. But the main thing now is completing her Bachelor’s studies.

The Merrill Program is a semester-long study programme for UP students at a US college or university, sponsored by partner schools in the USA, and funded by other sources: UP and the student’s own finances. It was founded more than thirty years ago by the American philanthropist, friend and benefactor of Palacký University, Charles E. Merrill (1920–2017).









# We live under international humanitarian law. We research, teach, and explain it

It's Thursday, 24 February 2022. The media is spreading an avalanche of news about the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army. War has broken out, the public breathlessly awaiting each new report from the front. A mere four days into the conflagration there is a round table at the UP Faculty of Law (UP FL) at which experts on international law are seated. They are offering their expertise on the legal rules which apply to the use of force during the course of armed conflicts. Anyone can listen, observe, and ask questions: the meeting is live-streamed on the faculty's YouTube channel. Over 20,000 people tune in.

Within just a few hours, CIHOL – the Centre for International Humanitarian and Operational Law, which prepared the roundtable and operates at UP FL – has entered the public consciousness, and experts from the centre are sought as information sources. The public and the media are among the target groups the centre strives to serve. On the airwaves, its members regularly give expert commentary on current global conflicts and crises.

This is but one small example of CIHOL's activities; the centre is celebrating five years of formalised endeavour. It originated out of prior cooperation between Olomouc academics and the Czech Armed Forces, the centre's key partner. "I'm not aware of another centre in Central Europe aimed at the legal topic of armed conflicts and questions connected to safety and the use of armed force. Or one so closely connected to a national army," says Martin Faix, the centre's head.

This unique workplace offers much more: it provides a broad spectrum of activities, but really, it's about the people who under its auspices produce such exceptional results: academics, experts from the Czech Armed Forces – in particular from Special Forces and the Reconnaissance Battalion – as well as a number of external international collaborators. "The incep-

tion and activity of the centre would be unthinkable were it not for the support which we get from our law faculty. It deserves great thanks," emphasises Faix.

When talking about exceptional results, it is necessary to mention the educational activities of the centre. Even international humanitarian law can be taught through experience. The centre annually runs Camp Peira, a several-day operational-tactical exercise where students and soldiers get out of their comfort zones, literally inside a military zone, learning in the field to mutually expand their horizons. "The last exercise simulated an international armed conflict based on the current situation in Moldavia and Transnistria," Faix detailed. The centre's package of educational activities is further supplemented by lectures, and this year there is a special summer school planned on the topic of the use of force in armed conflicts.

Centre members are also active academically. They organise conferences, lecture abroad, and work within research projects. When the faculty's telephone rings, it is nothing out of the ordinary if it is someone from the top echelon of the Czech Armed Forces on the other end of the line with a request for expert evaluation on the actual political-legal and humanitarian situation in a given locale – say, northern Mozambique. Now the centre is facing its greatest research challenge to date: a reference book to be published by Oxford University Press in 2026. Faix says the book will be aimed at an analysis and summary of the contemporary state of the use of force in international law.

CIHOL has only been active for five years, yet its significance and importance keeps growing. "Since the centre's founding, the security situation has only gotten worse. We would gladly prefer to research armed conflicts only from the theoretical-historical perspective. As if wars were a thing of the past. Sadly, that's not the case," adds Faix.

## CIHOL – Centre for International Humanitarian and Operational Law

Since 2019 it has been in operation under the auspices of the UP LF Department of International and European Law. The Czech Armed Forces are its main partner.

### Members from UP FL:

Martin Faix (Head of CIHOL), Marko Světec, Petr Stejskal, Dalibor Jílek, Pavel Bureš, Ondřej Svaček, Maxim Tomoszek

### Members from the Czech Armed Forces:

Otakar Foltýn, Deputy Chief of the Military Office of the President of the Czech Republic, and other representatives of Czech special forces and other regiments

### External collaboration:

Věra Honusková (Charles University Faculty of Law), Hennie Strydom, Martha M. Bradley (University of Johannesburg), Agata Kleczkowska (The Polish Academy of Sciences), among others

### Cooperating organisations:

International Committee of the Red Cross, Centre for Migration and Refugee Law (CEMIRELA) – Charles University Faculty of Law, Centro studi giuridici europei sulla grande criminalità – Università Degli Studi di Ferrara

### Awards:

UP FL received the 2020 National Security Council Award for Significant Contribution to the Security Policy of the Czech Republic. Main credit for the award was due to CIHOL's activities.

## Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry has a new visiting professor



Renowned specialist in neurodegenerative disorders Gabor G. Kovacs, who has been collaborating closely with Olomouc experts since 2009, became a visiting professor at the UP Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry. “His contribution will be appreciated – especially in postgraduate studies and in the programmes Neurology and Neurosciences – as he can hold thematic lectures and guide our students on foreign internships, providing consultations in their research and dissertations,” said Dean Milan Kolář when handing over the appointment decree. (vim)

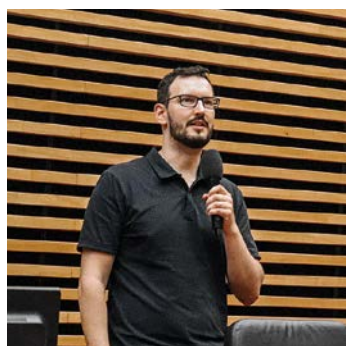
## Life captured by the lens of Milena Valušková



In the days of late socialism, when people languished in queues at the Olomouc marketplace, browsed empty shop shelves, attended staged May Day parades, and children strived to “find their place in the sun”, Milena Valušková was roaming the streets of Olomouc, camera in hand. She managed to capture a powerful testimony of the times, becoming one of the distinctive icons of Czech photography. A selection of her documentary work is comprehensively presented in the seventh book from the Olomouc Photographers series, a collaboration of UP Press and the Olomouc Museum

of Art. Valušková joins photographers Miloslav Stibor, Petr Zatloukal, Karel Kašpařík, Michal Kalhous, Blanka Lamrová, and Vladislav Galgonek in the series. (tof)

## How does the media shape our world view?



As part of the World of Media in the 21st Century series, Patrik Kořenář, a journalist and populariser of critical thinking, gave a talk in the UP Faculty of Education auditorium. He spoke on how to distinguish true statements from misleading ones and clarified the key principles of verifying information. He also dealt with disinformation and hoaxes, and described how media algorithms work, as well as showing how the human brain often facilitates manipulation. (map)

## International Spring School supports young scientists focused on biosensors

To present the latest findings in the development and application of advanced (nano) sensor technologies was the aim of the Spring School on Nanobiosensors and Printed Biosensors, organised in Olomouc by the Czech Advanced Technologies and Research Institute (CATRIN) of Palacký University within the framework of the TECHSCALE and SUSNANO projects. The University of Tirana and the Catalan Institute of Nanoscience and Nanotechnology (ICN2) also participated; 55 scientists were in attendance. “Participants gained theoretical and practical knowledge about the development and application of advanced biosensor technologies, established valuable contacts with experts from academia and industry, and gained inspiration for their own research and professional growth,” said Michal Otyepka from CATRIN on behalf of the organisers. The importance of the 3-day event, especially for young researchers, was also recognised by Arben Merkoçi from ICN2. (srd)







### For a healthy smile in Olomouc

Dental students from the UP Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry gave advice on how to properly take care of oral health in Olomouc's town centre. Dozens of young and old passers-by stopped at the stand on the Lower Square to get valuable tips and were rewarded with new toothbrushes and toothpaste. The Olomouc branch of the Czech Dental Students Association has been organising this preventative event for many years. (vim)

### The night belonged to law

Five hundred participants, twelve programme items, six participating institutions – that was the Night of Law in Olomouc. The nationwide event, which aims to popularise law targeting the broadest public, was held for the sixth time; in Olomouc for the first time on a larger scale, coordinated by the UP Faculty of Law. The programme included tours of courthouses, lectures for secondary school students, an autopsy, a lecture on cybercrime, and a Student Legal Clinic held unusually at night. The Night of Law is held annually around March 6, a notable day in legal history. It was on that day in 1920 that the Constitutional Charter of Czechoslovakia was proclaimed and came into force. (eha)



### Hundreds of students sought future employment at Window into Practice fair



A wide range of job opportunities were presented at the 18th edition of the Okno do praxe [Window into Practice] fair by over thirty companies offering job vacancies, temporary jobs, and internships to those interested. Students had the opportunity to orient themselves in the professional sphere, make useful contacts, get feedback on their CVs, master the art of self-presentation, and attend thematic lectures. The event, organised by the UP Faculty of Science and the UP Career Centre, attracted hundreds of UP students. (cho)

### Mazurová and Pospíšil dominated athletic championship again

The best athletes of this year's UP Athletic Championship were Martina Mazurová from the UP Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry and Jonáš Pospíšil from the UP Faculty of Physical Culture, both members of the Athletic Club Olomouc. Mazurová outperformed her competitors in the shot-put, which she sent to a distance of 15.45 metres, plus winning the discus throw. Pospíšil improved his personal best in the long jump, reaching 7.17 metres, and won gold in the 400-metre race. The UP Athletic Championship is a traditional event opening the summer athletic season in Olomouc. (vim)



interview

text: Ivana Pustějovská, Egon Havrlant  
photos: Jakub Čermák

# UP Rector Michael Kohajda: Times have changed, and we have to do something about it



He has always loved numbers and counting. He was so good at it that he voluntarily chose maths for his school leaving certificate subject. However, he did not become a professional “number-cruncher” but instead chose a career at first glance seemingly distant from the natural sciences: law. This year marks a quarter-century since his name and in fact his life have been attached to Palacký University. As a student, graduate, academic, vice-dean, and now... rector. As of May, jurist Michael Kohajda is the new rector of the second oldest university in the Czech Republic. How would he like to reshape the school? What qualities should its graduates have, and how will the university stand up to these dynamic times? You'll find out all this and more in our interview with Palacký University's new rector.

— Your professional academic career path in Olomouc has been quite direct. From student to teacher, to vice-dean, and now to the very top position.

I wasn't only in Olomouc. I completed my doctoral studies in Prague at the Charles University Faculty of Law. In my opinion, that was where the best financial law was being taught, under the tutelage of Prof Bakeš. That I was able to get two degrees at two such hallowed and traditional universities is an experience I consider positive and beneficial. I actually deviate a bit from that frequent “inbreeding” – when someone gets their Master's degree and doctorate at the same school and then stays there teaching and doing research, never leaving it for the rest of their professional life. I think it's better to go to different institutions; it brings one more experiences and inspiration.

— With that point of view, what would you like to bring into higher education in Olomouc, a university which has been around for some 450 years?

Traditional values are important to me, and universities have them. Respect for the heritage of the mantle I am assuming is one of the reasons why I decided to have the inauguration take place in the university Church of Our Lady of the Snows. I wanted to make it clear that we are continuing the work of our predecessors. Especially in today's hectic geopolitical times, it is important to emphasise the existence of a stable institution with a four-hundred-and-fifty-year history which has maintained its same principles and ideals. The world around us is changing, but the university remains, and we should not forget our his-

torical roots. They are part of the narrative which we at Palacký University are living and writing every day.

— That's the continuity you mentioned. But what is your conception for the future existence of Palacký University?

First, we must ensure that the university functions and continues further development. That may seem as obvious to some and that there's nothing too complicated in that. But I perceive many risks: especially in the proper functioning of academic self-government. If we are not able or will not be able to effectively govern ourselves, then we are handing someone else the argument that there should be changes made.

— This is a very hot political topic today, whether or not academic self-governance is proper. As an MP in Parliament, you must have certainly clocked the debates on this...

I often hear this when discussing the financing of universities. Universities are always asking for more money, arguing that they are underfunded. Of course it is legitimate to try to get more finances for development. But that is the view from inside the university. I feel it is also necessary to see how the outside world looks at us. And what they are looking at are our numbers and all the money that goes to us. Just to illustrate: as a year-on-year increase, the university received almost 10 million euros, and if you compare the roughly 1.25 million which we received in 2023 from contracted research, it is obvious that we are completely dependent on public funding. The money we earn is just a drop in the bucket of our total budget, which is in the tens of millions of euros. So then we should not be surprised that the authority who sends us the money wants us to budget it wisely and keep our house in order. There are relevant objections, and we have to show that we are capable of governing ourselves and that we are using the funds entrusted to us effectively.

— We probably need to be much more aware of the reality in which we live. The Czech Republic is going to have to invest more into areas such as defence...

I have a realistic view on the economics of universities, it's a topic I've done some serious thinking on. I've been a member of the parliamentary Budget Committee for four years, so let me mention that as a nation, we have a huge, systemic deficit, on the lev-

el of somewhere around 10 billion euros. Next year, spending will certainly increase in two key areas: defence and healthcare. Given that situation, I don't think higher education can be a priority at present. And when someone sends us 10 million euros as a year-on-year increase, that is a very fine outcome. We are talking about money which we are not automatically entitled to.

— Shouldn't we be prepared in the event another year-on-year increase doesn't happen, or even, as we have seen abroad, that our funding will be decreased?

I think our universities are not mentally prepared for that event. A few weeks back, I lectured at a university in Nebraska. Not a day goes by when their academic newsletter doesn't have information from the president that the school will be losing ten million dollars here or twenty million there, and what the practical impacts will be. The situation can change here, too, and we will have to deal with it. We have to be prepared systematically, mentally, and search for alternatives. One of my goals for UP in my four-year term is to increase non-public funding sources, and if from public sources, then on the basis of contractual agreements, in a kind of civil law relationship.

— Certainly not everyone in the ivory tower will be happy to hear we ought to also “raise” money.

Naturally, these opinions are not categorical. Some academics would consider it quite matter-of-fact, they already have established relationships outside the university, while others would say that such activities would take them away from their “pure” science. Okay, but that science is financed entirely by public funds. I would like the university to discuss this topic openly, because if we were to have a wider portfolio of funding sources, then we would be more resilient to outside influences.

— In your opinion, do you think the mission of Palacký University should be transformed? Should we launch a technical faculty, for example?

I don't agree with launching a new faculty in the next four years. I strongly believe we must first resolve the essential problems now facing us. The first is the relationship between CATRIN and the Faculty of Science. The second essential thing is the discomfort of students at one of our faculties. I'm talking about the Faculty of Health Sciences.

→



**Michael Kohajda (b. 1981)**

He completed his Master's degree in Law and Legal Science at the UP Faculty of Law. He got his doctorate and habilitation in Financial Law from the Charles University Faculty of Law. He has been teaching at the UP Faculty of Law for almost twenty years. Since 2020 he has been a vice-dean, first for Doctoral Studies, Qualification Proceedings and Finances including investments, and later for External Relations and Investments.

His research and publication activities are concentrated on financial law, especially public budgets, taxation, banking, insurance, and capital markets. Since 2024, he has been the principal investigator of the Czech Science Foundation project Crypto Assets as a Threat to Sovereignty. He has had a number of research and teaching stays in Europe, the USA, and Australia. In addition to his work in academia, he also has a successful legal practice. In 2021 voters from the Olomouc Region chose him to be their representative in the Czech Parliament through preferential voting.

— You mean that FHS does not have its own building, and that this has been a long-term problem?

Yes, we should go back and see what FHS was meant to be when it was established seventeen years ago. How many students should it have? Where should they be taught? I cannot fathom how one could found a new faculty and not think about how it would work in practice. The reality is that in some sections there are more students than seats. This is then the second problem we must resolve – to get this faculty working effectively. And unless

we have managed to resolve these two systemic issues, we are not in a situation within a four-year mandate to even think about founding a new, independent faculty. What we *can* do is give more support to the economic-managerial direction of studies which we already have, something also sought by the business sphere in both the Olomouc and the Moravian-Silesian regions.

— So the first thing you want to do is get the essential things into working order?

I think that we ought to admit that some things are not working and then have a serious talk about how to fix them. The university should consider things more strategically – for example, big investments. It shouldn't be business as usual that some areas are able to get a lot more money than others. This is a systemic problem. Only once we have determined our workloads, our classroom and laboratory capacities, etc., does it make sense to talk about new building construction. We lack such university-wide analyses. And once we do have them, we will know better how and where to expand.



— Ideally, the university should be like a glass house: it should be clear to all what is going on inside, what the rules are, where it is going, and how and on what it spends the money entrusted to it.

With a touch of idealism, I would like agreements made on all of this. In my opinion, it's about the mutual trust which should certainly prevail at the university, and which is necessary to renew, whether between various units or between employees. I would like to treat every faculty the same, to fairly devote equal time and space to each of them. It shouldn't be the squeaky wheel getting the grease. For me, all faculties are equally important and significant.

— You teach at the Faculty of Law. What do you like about working with students?

Teaching keeps me young. I'm always out there in front of young people and it's thanks to them, actually, that I sometimes forget I'm advancing in years.

— That's Michael Kohajda the teacher. But how does Michael Kohajda the rector see students?

I would like the students to fully enjoy the university experience and for the university to give them enough space and opportunities to do so. In addition to interesting study programmes, we also have to offer them a good environment. For studies and for relaxation. For example, I really miss the old U-klub, where I went to many concerts and where students could also realise their own projects, etc. In recent years it has been partly turned into a storage area and no longer serves the student body. I'm not okay with that, although I know restoring it to its former glory won't be easy. I also see a lack of athletic fields and study relaxation zones. I know that some will say: "We never had those, and we did just fine." But the times and the standards have changed, and if we want the narrative which the students here live for five years to be not only theirs but also the university's, we have to do something about it.

— Working with alumni is built upon working with students. How do you see that?

I believe that we should strengthen our work with alumni so that they feel themselves to be part of the university community even after they finish school. I'm aware that much has already been done in

this area, but it's necessary that that work should be systematic. We ought to take advantage of modern tools. If we have an app for students which makes their studies easier, then it would be great if that tool wasn't discarded after their studies are over. If we were able to shift it into "Alumni mode", then it could be a means of keeping in touch with our alumni. It could offer them information according to their choices, for example from their faculties or fields of study, allowing us all to keep in mutual contact. This way that student university narrative I mentioned could keep being written as an alumni narrative. The university could profit by that, too. We would get so much necessary feedback in practice to find out how our alumni are doing in the job market, and we could even do alumni fundraising on a system-wide basis.

— Perhaps we could take inspiration from the West, where universities have a good working relationship with donors, naming things after them. You have experienced that in the USA, haven't you?

I saw a building named after a Supreme Court justice who died. His family wanted his legacy to live on, so they paid for the construction and the faculty named a new building wing after him. But universities there also know how to work with smaller donations. For example, renaming an auditorium after a company for a certain period of time. I think we are going to have that debate here as well. Do we need the money, or not? What can we offer, and where are the boundaries beyond which we do not want to go? Is it acceptable to name an auditorium after Michael Kohajda because he gives us a million a year for the privilege? I do think it is important for those who give us the money to know exactly where it is going. That they can decide if they want to support a specific faculty or a specific student. We don't know how to do that at present.

— That was Michael Kohajda the teacher and rector. What about Michael Kohajda the lawyer? You were good at maths, but you became a legal expert. Yet you have found a place where numbers and paragraphs meet. One of your areas of interest is cryptocurrency, something you even recently lectured on in the USA. What interests you about that?

It's a new phenomenon, one which can even threaten a state's sovereignty. Money and currency have always been an instrument of power for the sovereign – i.e. a ruler or the state. It's not for nothing that we have laws to protect currencies. But once all the money – in the ordinary meaning of the word – spills over into decentralised activities where the state has no control, then of course the state loses some of its power, and that has a direct impact on its economic policies. Let's say for instance that you have a billion crowns in bitcoins. You do something for which you are legally liable to the tune of one million crowns. But you turn around and say you don't have that kind of money, and the state does not know how to enforce the fine, which is a highly abnormal situation, because the state can take money from a normal bank account, even confiscate your house and sell it. The state does not know what to do about these new currencies, and then its power to enforce the law is quite limited. These are uncharted waters, and new legislation must be written, which interests me greatly.

— You're an academic, a lawyer, but you've always been engaged in the community, in local politics, and now even in parliament. What led you to take such an active role as a citizen?

It's important. I was a town councillor for twelve years in Šumperk, and before that I was on various commissions. Taking an active part just seems natural to me. If someone has the opportunity and the abilities, they should do it. Not because of the money, but because you have the chance to make a difference in the place you live.

— By the way, how do you relax? You're a dog lover, aren't you?

Yes, I like to go for walks with my Tibetan mastiff. He's quite deliberate himself, so time permitting, we'll go out together for several hours at a time. But I don't take him to work, because he's very protective and wouldn't let anyone get near me. I also go to animal shelters and rescue stations, bringing food donations. The animals there have often had quite tragic histories, so I try to help them a bit. Otherwise, I like to play squash, I go mountain biking, and I love downhill skiing. But actually, I don't really have a great need for relaxation, I'm used to working hard. I'm lucky that in my work life, I can do what I like and what is fulfilling to me.



popularisation centre

text: Šárka Chovancová  
photos: Fort Science archives

# Fort Science celebrates a decade. UP's popular science centre has attracted one million visitors

Fort Science, opened in 2015 by the UP Faculty of Science (UP FS) in a former 19th-century munitions storehouse near the historic centre of Olomouc, is celebrating its tenth anniversary. One of the most important science popularisation centres in the Czech Republic, it has been visited by over a million visitors in that decade, many of whom return repeatedly to this popular interactive science centre boasting more than two hundred scientific exhibits.

The idea to build a modern centre for science popularisation in Olomouc was the brainchild of Juraj Ševčík, a former UP FS dean, who wanted to introduce natural sciences to the public in an attractive and understandable fashion. Construction on the science centre was begun

in 2013 with the help of European subsidies. In December 2014, three months before Fort Science's grand opening, Matěj Dostálek took the helm as director of the new centre. "My task at that time was to ensure the completion of the exhibitions and to build a team that would prepare its programme, devise an operations system, open Fort Science's gates, and ensure 80,000 annual visitors. Those were the conditions under which Palacký University received almost €8 million from the EU for the construction of this visitor centre," recalls Dostálek.

## Hands-on science

The main attraction of Fort Science are its interactive exhibits, introducing visitors to

the laws of natural science in an engaging way. UP FS staff and students participated in their creation. "We made the exhibits in our own workshops. This is our speciality, of which we are justly proud," says Dostálek. Workers there gradually installed, for example, a 1.5 m diameter hollow eyeball model, a 10 m model of the human brain which holds up to ten people inside, and interactive models of a volcano and the water cycle in nature. Each storey is thematically focused – on biology, astronomy, geology, and so forth.

Since opening in 2015, Fort Science has been visited by 750,000 paying visitors, plus numerous participants in science-popularisation events such as the Long Night of the Sciences, various social



gatherings, and conferences. “In total, we have had one million visitors over the past ten years,” says the director.

### The Fort connects the university with the public

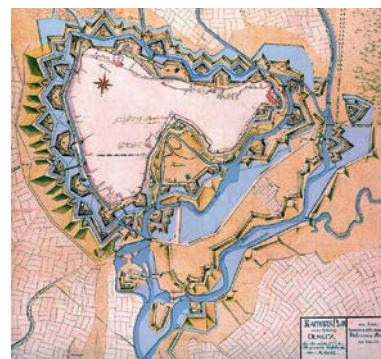
Equally important is updating the accompanying programme, so that every month the contents of the science workshops, planetarium, and science shows have something new to offer. The Fort organises more than a dozen scientific-popularisation events per year. “We have managed to build a community of our clients, i.e. visitors and partners, who take advantage of our entire portfolio of services. In addition to the exhibitions, workshops, and science shows, this mainly includes informal educational programmes for schools, of which we do around eight hundred annually, but also rentals of premises and our excursion programmes for businesses,” adds Dostálek.

The building housing Fort Science, an added attraction, is truly unique: a large munitions storehouse from the mid-19th century. Part of the exhibition space is therefore dedicated to Olomouc’s history. In its ten years, the Fort has become a venue for traditional events such as the Natural Science Fair, the Academia Film Olomouc festival, and the Children’s University. One of its most successful attractions now is the “Gross or Charming” event, where zoologists show live animals to visitors. The autumn Ghost Fort is also very popular. “On Halloween, we transform the exhibits into a haunted fort and our edutainers dress up as ghosts. These are events that typically attract more than two thousand

visitors on a weekend and are crucial to our budget,” says Dostálek. He adds that the regular events Mushrooms in the Fort, Health Fair, and Bees in the Fort are more intimate. However, they make it possible to integrate university research effectively and efficiently, while at the same time addressing scientific topics that resonate with the public.

### A nurturing place for students

In addition to its core staff, students are also involved in its operations. Since 2015, almost a thousand of them have passed through the popularisation centre, mostly from UP FS. They have held and hold positions as lecturers, guides, and edutainers. “Some of them even found jobs here, and for many it was a stepping stone to their future careers. Many Bachelor’s and Master’s theses and doctoral dissertations have started here. The fact that both UP students and employees use Fort Science’s capacities for their research is exactly the synergy that we are trying to support and develop,” explains Dostálek, adding that he is proud of the interconnection between the uni and the community. “We present faculty and university research to promote the university and education in general, which is in all of our best interests. Fort Science has become an environment not only for learning but also for cooperation, and has strong social overlap. Social outreach is the third mission of the university, and this is one of its biggest such projects – perhaps even the biggest of all Czech universities,” says Dostálek, in closing.



Fort Science was built inside a 19th century munitions storehouse.





# From dance to physiotherapy

During the day she studies physiotherapy, in the evening she attends classical and modern dance classes. Hana Němcová has been keen on dancing since kindergarten and has managed to effectively combine all her performances and competitions with her studies at both secondary school and university. For her, dance is fun as well as a way of learning about other countries and cultures. She's participating this June for instance in an international competition in Fréjus, France.

"I've been attracted to dancing since my childhood. My mother got a tip from my kindergarten teacher that I was gifted in dancing and that it might be worth enrolling me in an arts school. My dream was never about being a beautiful ballerina in ballet shoes

and a white tutu. I even had a crisis at one point and considered quitting dancing because it was too girly. But I was able to overcome it and have been dancing to this day, over fifteen years," says the Olomouc native, who studied dance along with the recorder and the alto flute at the Iša Krejčí primary arts school and then the Žerotín primary arts school. "However after starting secondary school, I had to sacrifice the flute. Classes were more demanding there, and I wanted to dedicate myself primarily to dance. In addition to arts school, I also attended dance camps over the summer, where we could try out different styles, such as hip-hop, jazz, the Limón technique, and musical theatre."

She achieved her first great success in solo dance, when she managed to win two

first places. "I prefer group dance though, I felt a bit shy to be on stage on my own," admitted Hana, a member of SK Dance, led by former ballet soloist of the Moravian Theatre Olomouc Simona Křenková and her daughter Sylva. Thanks to them, she also experienced the atmosphere of world competitions. "When we qualified for a competition in Portugal in 2019, it was a huge surprise for us. The competition is really tough, and we don't have so much drill at Czech arts schools as we don't practice every day," says the UP Faculty of Health Sciences student.

In the years following she danced at events in Spain, Germany, and Poland. "My mother, who is a physiotherapist, had a big influence on my choice of school. I had a 'first-hand' opportunity with her, so I knew what the job entails. I'd hate to have a routine office job. The beauty of physiotherapy is that it is a broad field that offers applications in many different directions. I also applied for sports physiotherapy in Brno, but I chose Olomouc. I wanted to continue dancing, and commuting would make it complicated."

She has managed to reconcile her busy study schedule with dance training. "Fortunately, we have most of our trainings in the afternoon and early evening, so it can be combined. But it's true that sometimes I had to run from school straight to dance class. There are also girls who are studying medicine or law in our dance group, and I admire them for how they do it all."

Under the guidance of Simona Křenková and her daughter Sylva, they prepared choreographies that qualified them for the Danza Mundial international competition in Fréjus, France in June. "We will present a total of four pieces in two days. They will include modern dance, classical dance in ballet shoes, and group choreography with children. I'm really looking forward to it – we hope to succeed in this big competition against dance superpowers like Great Britain and Spain," says Hana. Next year, she wants to pass her state final exams in physiotherapy. And dance? "I love it so much, I want to keep doing it in the future. I want dance to remain fun for me."





text: Martina Šaradínová  
photos: Jakub Čermák

experience



## Cambridge advanced me in many areas: It was intense and wonderful

Veronika Šedajová was already “ahead of the pack” in science during her studies. She won the coveted Jean-Marie Lehn Prize for Chemistry in 2022, and just after completing her PhD she has over 30 scientific papers to her credit, often in the most prestigious journals. She admits that her career and personal life have been greatly advanced by her stays abroad at top workplaces. The last one, from which she recently returned to CATRIN at Palacký University, falls into the category of dreams come true. Thanks to her diligence and talent, the physical chemist got to work at the world-famous University of Cambridge.

In April 2023, she was awarded a post-doctoral position at the Yusuf Hamied Department of Chemistry, where she was involved in materials research in close contact with industry. “It was a completely different microcosm than what I was used to. First I had to get used to the different environment and culture. I worked in a research group of over 50 people. Everyone came from different backgrounds, with different experiences and knowledge. But there was great collegiality, and no matter what problem I had, I knew whom to go to for help. Each of us was given precise duties and areas of responsibility,” she says, describing the environment there. →



**Veronika Šedajová (b. 1994)**

A physical chemist, she has been researching carbon materials and graphene derivatives since the beginning of her undergraduate studies. During her Bachelor studies, she started working at the Regional Centre for Advanced Technologies and Materials, now part of CATRIN at Palacký University. After starting doctoral studies, she devoted herself to the study of active materials for use especially in supercapacitors. She won the prestigious Jean-Marie Lehn Prize for Chemistry in 2022 and is the author/co-author of over 30 scientific papers.

Šedajová has international experience from prestigious institutes focusing on energy storage and materials science in the USA, France, Spain, and elsewhere.

After completing her PhD, she obtained a postdoctoral position at the University of Cambridge Yusuf Hamied Department of Chemistry, where she studied active materials for Li-ion batteries using optical scattering microscopy. Currently, she is working at CATRIN as a scientific researcher.

In that new environment, she also learned to look at science a bit differently. This was also because at CATRIN she had been doing mainly applied research, while at Cambridge it was fundamental research. “We often worked with commercially available materials, examining them in the minutest details. For example, I worked with colleagues on Li-ion batteries, where we tried to observe how they work, what causes their degradation and so on, right down to the atomic level. It was a different attitude toward research. It was not necessary to be the best in a certain field, although my colleagues also worked on projects of that sort, but rather to bring partial knowledge to a problem to complete its overall understanding. Experiencing this concept of science was very interesting. Seeing the top scientists there posing research questions and finding answers was a wonderful experience,” adds the researcher, who returned to CATRIN last November.


Thanks to the close connection with industry, Šedajová had the chance to peer into the corporate environment. Last but not least, she learned many new techniques and how to operate various instruments. At CATRIN, researchers mainly have operators who carry out measurements, but at Cambridge everyone does everything themselves, which has advantages and disadvantages. “It’s totally different when you sit at the microscope and have to arrive at results yourself. The pieces seem to fall into place faster. But on the other hand, it takes much longer to get to a result,” she explains.

In addition to professional knowledge, she gained a lot of experience for her personal development. She described how inspiring and motivating the research group led by Prof Clare P. Grey was. The high degree of internationalisation taught her even more respect. “Compared to the Czech academic environment, there is significantly more internationalisation and diversity,

and the position of women in science is also viewed differently. You are instilled with a lot more respect. Although at CATRIN the level of internationalisation is high, at British universities it is higher still. At one point, 26 nationalities were represented in our 50-person group alone. I made friends with my colleagues and also people outside of work whom I will miss,” she says.

Now she’s back at CATRIN working on how to successfully put into practice a high-capacity electrical storage device using a graphene-derived material she took part in developing. But the work in Cambridge has remained deep inside her. “Even though it was often not easy, it was quite an education for me. I have to admit that it advanced me in many areas. I am very grateful to Prof Grey, her support was incredible. And I am also grateful to Michal Otyepka, in whose group I’m now working, for giving me the opportunity when I returned,” she concluded.





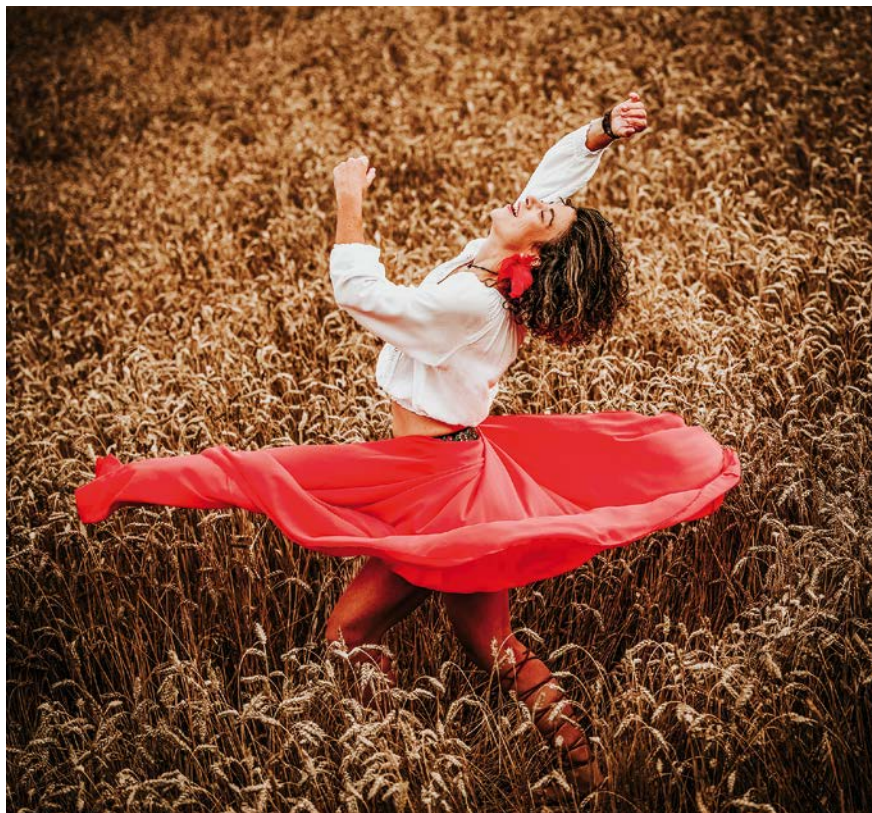
text: Martin Višňa  
photos: Hana Pauchová, Radim Kolíbk

alumna

# Kaczi, the mountains and music lover

The Beskydy Mountains. Just saying the name of her native place gives her goosebumps. It is her home, her source of energy, the inspiration for her music. And she can hardly imagine life without music. When she tosses her curly hair on stage, starts playing her accordion and singing alto, it's a thrilling experience. And also a performance you would not expect from the typical UP Faculty of Physical Culture graduate. However Kateřina Kouláková, a.k.a Kaczi, is far from typical.





**Kateřina Kouláková  
a.k.a. Kaczi (b. 1991)**

A graduate of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the Palacký University Faculty of Physical Culture and the Jaroslav Jeřek Conservatory in Prague, singer, musician, composer, and lover and promoter of her native Beskydy Mountains. She has released two albums: *Kněhyně* (Mt Kněhyně, 2024) and *Nahá* (Naked, 2021), and an EP, *Polonahá* (Half-Naked, 2019). She specialises in holding concerts in the mountains. In 2012, she won the CzechTalent Zlín competition and was nominated for the Jantar and Anděl national music awards. She is also a singing instructor and compère. Besides music, her greatest hobby is movement: whether walking, running, or dancing.

Her passion for movement drew her to Recreation and Leisure Studies in Olomouc, but after a year of full-time study, her love for music and singing made her relocate to Prague, where she was accepted at the Jaroslav Jeřek Conservatory. She continued to commute to the Olomouc Neředín campus as a distance student.

“It was fun, I remember Recreation Studies very fondly. I learned how to swim and many other sports, as well as a lot of practical things that I use to this day. I had the opportunity to get involved in various projects, even international ones, and most importantly I met great people there. The most valuable thing from studies in Olomouc are two best friends of mine, Lucie Borová and Tereza Scharda. The funny thing is that Tereza and I met on an experiential course in Lipnice, even though she’s from a neighbouring village,” says Kaczi.

She has been surrounded with musicians since she was a child, so it is not surprising that she used experience from her family band’s educational concerts in her Bachelor’s thesis. “By means of songs and stories from celebrities like Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison, we warned about how alcohol and drug use ruins people’s lives; we also raised awareness about AIDS and even bullying. I hope it made some impact on the pupils who attended our concerts. Anyway, my Bachelor’s thesis was success-

ful,” recalls the musician, who is proficient on guitar and ukulele, apart from the accordion, which she learned to play because of her grandfather.

Her own first songs were rock-influenced and had English lyrics; today she says they were products of her beautiful and naive youth, when she believed she was going to change the world. It wasn’t until a couple of years later that she made a breakthrough in a more significant way with her singles in Czech, “Naked” [Nahá] and “The End of a Career” [Konec kariéry], which combine traditional songwriting with modern trends and a touch of the distinctive mentality of Northern Moravia.

“That was a time of some kind of transition and cleansing for me. I realised that I wasn’t giving music everything I wanted, as I was doing a lot of other things, too. As part of the cleansing, I went on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, and after that I started giving music my full attention, investing my whole body and soul, as well as finances. I decided to become a full-time musician, which was definitely a hard path, but it made sense for me – and it has paid off,” says Kaczi, who has already released several singles and two full-length albums, is working on another one, and tours the Czech Republic and beyond.

Her specialty is performing in the mountains, which started, naturally, in her na-

tive Beskydy Mountains, on Mt Lysá. “It was a reaction to the Covid lockdown, I just wanted to play. So I grabbed my instruments and climbed the mountain. I dare to say that the concerts on Mt Lysá have become a phenomenon, with people from different parts of the country going to them like on holiday. I really enjoy this combination of mountains and music, so I want to keep developing this concept of travelling not just for music but for a broader experience. I’m always on the lookout for other unconventional and attractive locales.”

While ‘mainstream’ locations such as Mt Lysá or the Pustevny mountain saddle are great for her concerts, when she goes to the mountains without musical instruments, she prefers quiet places with a minimum of people. “I’m on a mission – to hike the Beskydy Mountains all the way through, to walk down every single path. There are lots of nameless hills and magical places without hiking markers, and they can really recharge you. I found one such wonderful hill recently,” Kaczi adds.

She admits that she could perhaps imagine living somewhere other than the Beskydy Mountains. But a life without music? No way. “Sometimes I wonder what would happen if I stopped loving music. But then I pick up the guitar or accordion, start singing and dancing, and there’s no doubt. Music is a deeply integral part of my life, I just can’t do without it.”



# Chemist Lukáš Kučera: From home brewing to a university micro-brewery

Lukáš Kučera learned to brew his own beer as a home brewer. But he didn't stop there. He thought it would be a good idea if he could share his knowledge. And because he is primarily a chemist working at the UP Faculty of Science Department of Analytical Chemistry, he wondered how he could translate his experience to his students.

"Beer as a phenomenon can be studied from many angles. You can take a look at the history of brewing, the evolution of recipes and beer culture over the ages, the geographical differences in the approach to the brewing process, the use of modern technologies in contemporary brewing, or even the health aspects of drinking beer. As a home brewer, I have been making beer since 2017. So I thought, why not share my experience with my students?" the chemist recalls.

He has followed that idea through to its logical conclusion. In 2022, the UP Faculty of Science opened its own experimental Eureka Brewery, joining a number of other universities that have breweries.

Unlike other university breweries which are usually connected with Brewing and Malting programmes, a specialised technical subject at some Czech universities, Kučera wanted to make the brewery accessible to

students of all disciplines and to introduce them to the entire brewing process.

In order to run a brewery properly, it is necessary to have the requisite professional qualifications. Thus Kučera completed a brewer's qualifications course while setting up the university brewery. "But the biggest problem was administrative, especially permission for the brewery to operate at the Faculty of Science. At least we're not a commercial brewery, so we don't need a business license nor have to undergo state hygienic inspections."

Students in the Exercises in Beer Chemistry course, taught in the Department of Analytical Chemistry, design recipes that are then made at participating microbreweries. For example, on the occasion of the christening of the brewery, the 70th anniversary of the Faculty of Science, and the 450th anniversary of UP, the special beer RE450N UP was produced in cooperation with Olomouc's Chomout Brewery. Students also took part in a tasting competition called the Student Beer League, part of the Moravská vernisáž piva [Moravian Beer Exhibition]. A group of female students also produced a special pink beer called BrewHer as part of the international Pink Boots Collaboration Brew Day in-

itiative, supporting women in brewing. Their West Coast IPA-style beer was available to sample on the 10th anniversary of the opening of UPoint, Palacký University's shop and information centre.

Lukáš Kučera came to the study of analytical chemistry completely by chance. When he was not accepted to the study of Dentistry, he decided to go work in Italy. His mother, however, could not accept her son not having a university degree, so she enrolled him in a field of study where he was accepted without having to take the entrance exams.

"I went to the uni just to make my mother happy. When I graduated with a degree in Chemistry, Geology, and Environmental Protection, I was the only one in my class who was still there. However during my Bachelor's studies, I discovered that I didn't want to pursue geology, but rather chemistry instead. I was fascinated by its diversity. Analytical chemistry can be used for any kind of analysis. Currently, I am engaged in analyses of tangible cultural heritage, examining samples from archaeological excavations, decorations on metal and glass objects, even the contents of ceramic vessels – which means the remains of food and drink," adds Kučera.

## THE EUREKA BREWERY

**Eureka!** is an exclamation at an unexpected, sudden discovery, or at the result of a successful experiment. The expression is associated with Archimedes of Syracuse, who was so bowled over by his sudden understanding of the interplay between the behaviour of bodies and the fluid in which the body is immersed (Archimedes' Law) that he jumped out of the bathtub and ran naked down the street, shouting Eureka!

When the idea of creating a university brewery to serve as a platform for interdisciplinary and inter-faculty collaboration was conceived in 2022, the name Eureka immediately came to mind.



# Aleš Pop, the IT puppet principal: Puppetry is hard work but I can't live without it

Although it may seem at first glance that the classic “Kasper the Puppet” has little to offer to today’s children in competition with modern superheroes, the opposite is true. The Olomouc puppet theatre Kasper’s Empire does not suffer from a lack of interest of young audiences. Its principal, Aleš Pop, known at Palacký University as “the computer guy” – a network administrator, currently employed at the Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology (CMFT) – has first-hand experience.

“Kasper is still a phenomenon, and kids love him and need him. If he doesn’t appear himself in a play, he at least greets them at the beginning,” says the head of the amateur puppet theatre, which has been operating in Olomouc for 105 years. “The kids still keep coming. What has changed is the age group. In the past, 14-year-olds used to come; today it’s common to see two-year-olds with their parents or grandparents, and the oldest children are 7 years old. The plays are adjusting to that. Contemporary audiences wouldn’t be able to process the Faust we used to perform. You can tell, however, which children have parents who read to them,” he adds.

Aleš Pop has been around the world of puppetry since he was a child – his father, Zdarek Pop, was a great enthusiast and the master puppeteer of Kasper’s Empire since the 1960s, and his mother also helped in the theatre, dressing the puppets. “Whenever I could, I tried to help, so for example I painted puppets. Though since I suffered from polio, I spent a lot of time in hospitals and sanatoriums. Once I started studying at electrical engineering school, I helped out with technical stuff in the theatre,” he recalls.

He took over the theatre’s management after his father’s death in 2008. It was not an easy decision – he knew his free time was over, that he had to sacrifice everything to the theatre. He only had two free weekends in the last season. As he says, it’s a lot of hard work, but he couldn’t live without it.

What does a puppet theatre principal do? “I take care of technical support, re-

pairing puppets, dealing with the funding paperwork and correspondence, printing tickets, and sometimes I even speak for a character during a performance. However, I don’t climb to the top spotlight anymore for health reasons and I don’t even do our web pages. I hate that, albeit being an IT specialist,” he laughs at the paradox, in his theological faculty office full of cables and various gadgets. In his previous job he looked after the computer network at the UP Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry.

“Electronics has always been my major hobby. I was always tinkering with something, my workbench was a mess. I was fixing TVs as a student. In the 1990s I got more familiar with computers when I worked on DTP. However, my health started acting up, my back started hurting, and I realised I was spending most of my day working, so I stopped. And then it turned out they were seeking a network admin at the medical faculty,” he explains. He will have spent his third decade at the university now, and a few years ago he was already considering retirement. Nevertheless, he accepted an offer to help out at CMFT.

As a network administrator, he says he’s also a jack of all trades. Whatever he can do, he’ll do; he finds out what doesn’t work and installs it; if he knows, he gives advice; and if he doesn’t, he recommends contacts among his colleagues at the Computer Centre. “Sometimes it’s stressful when teachers call to say they have a class starting in a few minutes and can’t turn something on. And sometimes I wonder what they have done with the devices in question, despite simple instructions everywhere. However, I love being here,” he admits.

To tell the truth, every penny counts. Especially if you run a puppet theatre as a volunteer and amateur in your spare time and even dare to organise the biennial Čechova Olomouc festival, the title of which refers to the founder of the scene, František Čech. “I will not let the theatre go down,” concludes Pop.



## Aleš Pop (b. 1957)

As a secondary school student, he was interested in communication and security technology, worked in Přerov mechanical engineering companies, also at Czechoslovak State Railways, and later he made a living in DTP. Since 1996 he has been an employee of the UP Computer Centre; he worked as a network administrator at the UP Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry for two decades; now he’s employed at the Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology. He the principal of the Olomouc puppet theatre Kasper’s Empire, which he took over after the loss of his father. He is also the chairman of the Association of Amateur Puppeteers at the Czech Amateur Theatre Association.



photo: Jakub Čermák

reflection



**Luca Chiurchiu** is a postdoctoral fellow at the Palacký University Faculty of Arts Department of Romance Languages. His research delves into 20th and 21st century Italian literature.

*“Praga magica” è il titolo di un saggio narrativo molto bello di un poeta e studioso italiano che per primo ha introdotto la cultura Ceca in Italia: Angelo Maria Ripellino. Proprio grazie a questo saggio, e alle traduzioni di Ripellino, ho conosciuto la Repubblica Ceca per la prima volta: sono entrato in contatto con autori immensi come Hrabal e Hašek e con una visione del mondo del tutto particolare, in apparenza lontanissima da quella del mio paese d’origine: una visione disincantata e piuttosto disperata, alle volte, ma mai arresa, mai rassegnata, direi piuttosto amaramente divertita, comunque le cose vadano e per quanto queste stesse cose sembrano oscure e inaffrontabili, almeno all’inizio.*

*Poi ho avuto la fortuna di visitare davvero la Repubblica Ceca, e il privilegio di viverci, in particolare a Olomouc. La prima volta da studente, nella primavera del 2014, grazie al programma Erasmus+ attivo presso UPOL, e poi, per due anni, grazie all’OP JAC Project “MSCA Fellowships at Palacký University II”, cofinanziato dall’Unione Europea e dal Ministero dell’Istruzione Ceco, dal settembre del 2023 a quello del 2025. In questi ultimi mesi Olomouc è diventata la mia seconda casa: la sua dimensione non troppo grande e vivibilissima, così simile a quella delle città della mia regione in Italia (Marche), e la gentilezza dei suoi abitanti mi hanno fatto sentire parte di una comunità nonostante le barriere linguistiche. Anche nell’ambiente di lavoro mi sono trovato molto bene: i colleghi, le colleghe e le studentesse e gli studenti del Dipartimento di Lingue Romanze e i responsabili del mio progetto hanno favorito la mia integrazione presso UPOL trattandomi sempre da pari e dandomi sostegno concreto per qualsiasi iniziativa. In questi due anni, infatti, ho cercato quanto più possibile di creare collegamenti con il mondo della letteratura contemporanea italiana, organizzando un convegno internazionale e alcuni incontri con studiosi ed editori che, mi auguro, porteranno in seguito ad altre collaborazioni.*

*Spero di essere riuscito a restituire almeno un poco di quello che questa esperienza mi ha dato, a onorare la fiducia di coloro che hanno creduto in me e di aver lasciato una piccola impronta positiva del mio passaggio a UPOL e in quella che per me, ormai, è la mia Olomouc magica.*

*“Praga magica” is the title of a very beautiful essayistic account by an Italian poet and scholar who was the first to introduce Czech culture in Italy: Angelo Maria Ripellino. It was thanks to this essay and Ripellino’s translations that I got to know the Czech Republic – I came into contact with great authors such as Hrabal and Hašek, and also with a completely distinctive view of the world that at first seemed so distant from that of my native country. A view that is often disarming and rather hopeless but never resigned nor restrained. I even might say one that is bitterly amused, no matter how things turn out nor how dark or insoluble they may seem at first.*

*Then I was lucky enough to actually visit the Czech Republic and live there, namely in Olomouc. The first time as a student in spring 2014 thanks to the Erasmus+ programme at Palacký University, then for two years thanks to the Johannes Amos Comenius Operational Programme’s project “MSCA Fellowships at Palacký University II”, co-financed by the EU and the Czech Ministry of Education, from September 2023 to September 2025. In the last few months, Olomouc has become a second home for me – thanks to its reasonable size and great liveability, which reminds me of the towns in my native Italian region of Marche. Also, the kindness of its inhabitants allowed me to feel part of the community here, despite the language barriers. I feel very comfortable in the working environment here, too – all my colleagues and fellow students in the Department of Romance Languages as well as my project supervisor have made my integration at UP easy by always treating me as an equal and providing me with real support for any initiative. During these two years, I’ve tried my best to connect with the world of contemporary Italian literature, organising an international conference and several meetings with experts and publishers, which will hopefully lead to further collaborations.*

*I hope that I’ve managed to give back at least a little of what this experience has given me, that I’ve fulfilled the trust of those who believed in me, and that I’ve left a small, positive mark on UP and on what is “mia Olomouc magica” to me already now.*

# Jaromír Lang (1914–1979)

## Ambassador, “Neumannologist”, and Dean of the Palacký University Olomouc Faculty of Arts

In the modern history of the Palacký University Olomouc Faculty of Arts (since its reinstatement on 21 February 1946) there haven't been very many individuals who have compensated for their professional indolence by their ideological and political involvement. Jaromír Lang leads the pack. He hailed from Bojanovice near Klatovy, where he was born on 6 April 1914. During his studies at the Charles University Faculty of Arts, where he finished in 1939 with a PhD in philosophy, he was involved in left-wing student organisations, including the Communist Student Faction (Kostufra), having already joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1938. During the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, he was imprisoned in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp from 1939–1940, and briefly in Pankrác prison, but then made a living as an editor at a publishing house. After the liberation of Czechoslovakia, he held cultural and political positions in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and taught at the newly reinstated Charles University Faculty of Education.

### Husband of president's granddaughter

According to the recollections of Olomouc historian Josef Bieberle (1929–2018), “in person, Lang was a witty bon vivant who played the lute”, charming his way into marriage with Herberta Masaryková (1915–1996), granddaughter of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937), first president of Czechoslovakia. Herberta had divorced her husband, art historian Emanuel Poch (1903–1987), in 1943 and she and Lang raised her daughter Charlotte (b. 1940, married name Kotíková). Afterwards, Jaromír Lang sometimes signed himself as Lang-Masaryk. The date of Lang's divorce from Herberta is not found in her numerous bios nor the newspaper interviews with her after the November 1989 Velvet Revolution.

During the communist takeover of Czechoslovakia in February 1948, Lang participated in the activities of the Action Committee at the Charles University Faculty of Education; in the spring of that year

he was accepted into the diplomatic services of the communist Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry, and that June he was appointed ambassador to Switzerland. But in mid-1949 he was relieved of his post and became the Czechoslovak delegate to the UNESCO Directorate in Paris; the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry finally severing ties with Lang in early 1951. However, it is not true what is claimed in the publication *Diplomacie Československa* [The Diplomacy of Czechoslovakia, Prague 2013] that “the marriage to T.G. Masaryk's granddaughter Herberta probably contributed to this”. Lang, after his divorce from Masaryková, married Emilia Hallová (1916–?), an employee of the Chancellery of the President of the Czech Republic, on 28 February 1950, who gave birth to a daughter Taťjana in 1951, and a son Alexandr in 1965.

### Swiss pianist's pinky

According to Bieberle, in Bern, Switzerland, Czechoslovak ambassador Lang “had a serious incident regarding the wife of a pianist; in a tussle with the latter, Lang either broke or bit off the pianist's little finger. Naturally he had to be recalled.” He was then placed as an associate professor at the Charles University in Prague Faculty of Arts, where he soon faced employment and legal problems. We must add that Lang, in addition to various prefaces and afterwords, as well as the book edition (1957) of the infamous Communist and proletarian writer Stanislav Kostka Neumann's (1875–1947) journal *Červen*, also publishing his sole monograph *St. K. Neumann: Four lectures* (1957), thus earning a dubious reputation for concocting a unique literary discipline – “Neumannology”.

### University circus?

In the years 1961–1963, Lang held the position of Dean of the UP Faculty of Arts; Bieberle writes about Dean Lang's start: “Had it not been for his responsible vice-dean, Assoc Prof A. Václavík, the faculty would have deteriorated into a circus in no time. (...) His clashes with the faculty's management led to Lang soon becoming ‘persona non grata’

in Olomouc. Lang would only show up at the school once a week or even once a fortnight, not even trusting the people who worked for him.” In particular, he had a go at the eminent literary scholar Oldřich Králík, whom he called a “clerico-fascist”. The following year Lang was on “sick leave”, and in January 1964 he began working at the University of 17 November in Prague (a communist-era university for students from former European colonies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America) as head of the Department of Cultural Politics and later at the Department of the History of Czech Literature.

### Among the “ultras”

After the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact armies on 21 August 1968, Jaromír Lang's already “vetted profile” predestined him to occupy leading political positions in the post-1968 “Normalisation” period. From 1969–1971, Jaromír Lang was an MP and member of the Czech National Council, but he was particularly involved in the activities of the ultra-left political organisation Levá fronta (Left Front), headed by Lang's Olomouc cronies, professors of medicine Miloslav Matoušek (who hid him from Interpol in the Swiss affair) and Jaromír Hrbek (from August 1969 to June 1971, Minister of Education of the Czech Socialist Republic). However, the Left Front, as a gathering place for radical dogmatists and neo-Stalinists a/k/a “ultras”, caused a rift among members of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), particularly its chairman Gustáv Husák (1913–1991, and president of Czechoslovakia 1975–1989), for its sectarian stance, so in 1970 it was merged into the Socialist Academy. According to Bieberle, following a big scandal, Jaromír Lang was likely the only ultra ever kicked out of the KSČ in the 1970s. Lang surfaced again in 1975 in connection with the affair surrounding writer Rudolf Černý's (1920–1982) efforts to publish his “memoirs” of Antonín Novotný (1904–1975; president of Czechoslovakia 1957–1968), not published in book form until 1998–1999 and 2008. Prof Jaromír Lang died in Prague on 17 June 1979.







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