

# Village as Ecological Entity

## Introducing Bees in Topolò

*“What if the social, economic, and political contradictions spawned in the modern city were to be flipped? What if plants and non-human animals were understood as city dwellers and spatial producers, giving us the opportunity to understand and design living spaces for a wide range of users beyond pure exploitation, speculation, and utilitarianism? Could the complex structure of the city as an inter-species space open up new modes of subjectivation, kinship, and solidarity? Could it produce and promote a concept of politics and subjectivity beyond neoliberal individualism?” – Marion von Osten*



# Village as Ecological Entity

The project *Village as Ecological Entity - Introducing Bees in Topolò* is a further reflection on *Topolò/Topolove - Village as House*, an award winning project of the 2022 *New European Bauhaus prize*.<sup>1</sup>

*Topolò/Topolove - the Village as House* envisions the restoration of the village of Topolò (UD, Italy) – of its abandoned houses, neglected public spaces and ruderal landscape – as if it was a decentralised house where singular buildings are its rooms and the small streets between the houses are the connecting hallways. The project assigns specific communal programmes to different empty houses of the village: a common library with a cinema; a shared kitchen that becomes a restaurant; public baths, communal bathrooms and laundry; a workshop and a collectively maintained garden. Such a way of conceiving a village invites its dwellers to fluidly move from one building to another – from their private bedroom, to the common kitchen or workshop – inhabiting the village as a set of interconnected spaces. This spatial decentralisation of the house is also an extension of the relation of care, which is directed not only to private spaces but also to common buildings and the spaces between them.

*Topolò/Topolove - the Village as House* is an experiential exercise of collective care-taking of a place, where inhabitants of Topolò are re-imagined as stewards and custodians of the village. But what happens if this care-taking and agency-giving exercise were to be extended to plants and non-human animals? What if the village instead of being understood just as a series of spaces cared for by humans is conceived as an ecological entity that includes human and non-human components?

<sup>1</sup> For further information about the project, please visit:  
<https://robidacollective.com/projects/the-village-as-house> and  
<https://2022.prizes.new-european-bauhaus.eu/>

# Introducing Bees in Topolò

Honeybees are not only a fundamental part of the biodiversity on which we all depend for our survival but they also reveal and display our relationship with nature. Thus they become a symbol of caring for and with nature. Honeybees open our minds towards a coexistence between human and non-human worlds and foster respect for nature's gifts - like honey. They vitalise the ecosystem where they are introduced through their activity: by pollinating fruit-trees and wildflowers, attracting singing birds, as they offer a protein-source for young birds and also by collaborating with humans in the production of honey.

*Village as Ecological Entity - Introducing Bees in Topolò* seeks to initiate a bee-stand with 3-5 bee families through a week-long series of workshops and seminars bringing together the practice of bee-keeping (how to set up a beehive, inspect a colony, biology of the superorganism, as well as an introduction to bee friendly plants in the area) with readings on support structure (Condorelli), collaborative survival (Tsing), Ethics of Care (Tronto) and the Planetary Turn (Spivak). Therefore, the bee stand becomes another spatial component in the village: a place to sit, feel and wonder about ecological questions, while watching bees fly in and out. But it also becomes a site for action: caring for the beehives, harvesting honey, filling pots and sharing it among family and friends.

Through practical engagements and readings on-site we weave making and thinking. These encounters hope to propel new modes of thought, providing alternative ways of living on a broken planet and celebrating naturecultures. Naturecultures is a term coined by Donna Haraway, who argues for the dissolution of the chasm between humans and Nature (with a capital N, objectified and othered). Following this term, *Village as Ecological Entity - Introducing Bees in Topolò* focuses on learning as a form of living, understanding each action we take as a learning process. The project invites others to learn with us and to acknowledge our relations with the site and how we cohabit with its many living forms.

# Timeline

January-March: Conceptualisation of workshops and seminars. Communication and marketing campaign development. Open call for participants. Launch of open call via Robida's website and social media channels.

March: Field study of the village and its surroundings' vegetation to determine the potential site for honeybee stands and the honey room.

April-May: *Village as Ecological Entity* - A week long series of workshops and seminars takes place in Topolò.

May-June: Documentation via Robida collective Magazine and Radio.

# Budget

Curatorial/organisational fees - inclusive of content production, texts and communication support, moderation of events  
2000€

Invited speakers fees, 3-5 workshop/seminar facilitators  
1500€

Material costs for beehives and honey room, workshops and seminars, including printing of readers  
2000€

Travel and accommodation  
1000€

Total = 6500€

Covered by Robida Collective via EU prize = 5000€

# Biographies

**Erika Mayr** (1973) has been trained as a landscape gardener and horticulturist. While developing a project for Detroit in 2004, she discovered various aspects of urban beekeeping. Back in Berlin, Erika started her own beekeeping enterprise on rooftops and became a key figure in the upcoming beekeeping scene of the city. Over time she developed a specific taste and knowledge about honey and a way to share with people. As a co-founder of *Stadthonigfest* (2011-2018) she organised a yearly honey market at Prinzessinnengarten, at its first location in Berlin-Kreuzberg. As curator of the *Honey Lab 2016* (Stadtlandfood Festival Markthalle Neun, Berlin) she collaboratively created a tasting bar with honey samples collected within the city limits and labelled with personal information about each beekeeper. During summer-schools organised by *Animalesque-Berlin* (2018,2019) the “bees+trees” bicycle-tour through Berlin and the honey-tasting afterwards gave insights for the students of how everything around us is linked and connected. Erika was director of the *Charlottenburg Beekeepers Association* from 2008 to 2019. In 2020 she relocated to Rome, where she is transforming the green areas at the *German Academy Villa Massimo* towards a more bee-friendly and sustainable garden. She also installed her apiary of 6 bee-families.

[www.stadtbienenhonig.com](http://www.stadtbienenhonig.com)

**Vida Rucli** (1993) is one of the members of *Robida*, a collective that works at the intersection of words and spatial practices in relation to the small village of Topolò, at the border between Italy and Slovenia. In 2014 she co-founded *Robida magazine*, a situated magazine which speaks of Topolò never mentioning it directly but operating with concepts the place generates.

She co-curates the public program and projects of *Robida collective*, working in the intertwining of theory and practice by writing and imagining the village's future.

**Robida** is a non profit association, based in Topolò/Topolove (UD), that takes care of the abandoned terraces, occupies houses and gardens, opens a communal space (Izba) and re-imagines the village. The collective works at the intersection of written and spoken words (with *Robida magazine* and *Radio Robida*) and spatial practices in relation to the village. In 2022 Robida was the recipient of the *New European Bauhaus prize* given by the European Commission for the project *Topolò/Topolove – Village as House*.

[www.robidacollective.com](http://www.robidacollective.com)

**Topolò/Topolove** is a village of 25 inhabitants in North-Eastern Italy, very close to the border with Slovenia.

Home to a community of almost 400 inhabitants at the beginning of the 20th Century the village lost until nowadays its almost total population, due to economic and political reasons. The place, in fact, was the background of all the crucial events of 20th Century's history, from WW1 to the Cold War. Considered as part of a contested territory during the First and Second War and being inhabited by the Slovene minority, transformed it into a highly controlled area until the end of the Cold War. The tension of living on a territory under very strict military surveillance with very little economic potential made the majority of inhabitants of the village to leave it. In the 90s the place counted only 50 people.

In 1994 the art project *Stazione di Topolò/Postaja Topolove* started in Topolò: in 30 years the event brought public interest to the village and its history and inspired many about the possibility for the place to re-flourish. The presence of *Robida collective* in the village is a fruit of that creative environment.

[www.robidacollective.com/topolo](http://www.robidacollective.com/topolo)