

# GREEN MEADOW



a documentary theatre production about

the closure of the Nuclear Power Plant Ignalina  
RBMK-1500 in Lithuania

# PROLOG



The city of Visaginas, formerly exclusively built to accommodate the largest nuclear power station of the then Soviet Union, lies in the lakeside forests of Lithuania, on the border with Latvia and Belarus. The monoindustrial city is experiencing its decline with the closure of the "Ignalina" power plant as part of the Lithuanian EU accession. A theater project takes up the effects of fundamental change, includes the inhabitants of the once proud city and creates spaces that enable their voices to be heard.

The changes are to be seen in the context of the re-emergence of national currents, the tensions between Russia and the West, the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the development of a pilot project of decommissioning a nuclear power plant, and a rethinking of energy issues. In the following pages, we look at the underlying historical, social, political, economic and cultural developments and examine the project in more detail.

# THE ATOMIC CITY VISAGINAS



The history of the city of Visaginas (until 1992 Sniečkus) is closely linked to the history of the Ignalina nuclear power plant and can be divided into three phases according to the political changes.

The first phase begins with the decision of 13 September 1974 to build the nuclear power station Ignalina and the satellite city Sniečkus (named after Antanas Sniečkus, the head of the Lithuanian Communist Party). This project should demonstrate the transition of the Soviet Union to modernity: the Ignalina nuclear power plant as a flagship model and Visaginas as a "socialist paradise", built in the form of wings from a butterfly.

Characteristic for centrally planned and state financed socialist projects was the enormous extent of the construction work. This was also due to the special importance of the RBMK-1500 power station, as it housed the world's strongest reactor at the time of construction. After only five years of construction, in 1983, the reactor was connected to the grid.



Between 1979 and 1989, 25,000 immigrants moved to Sniečkus, the majority of Russian descent. Privileges such as high-class living quarters, the good supply of food and clothing, as well as above-average salaries and other benefits, many highly educated people from the entire Soviet Union were attracted to Sniečkus. The first arrivals were temporarily accommodated in quickly established residential quarters, caravans or amongst locals.

Due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, not all construction works were completed according to plan. In addition to the built two reactors of the Ignalina nuclear power plant, two more blocks were to be built and the city was to be extended to the north-east, thus obtaining its second (butterfly) wing. However, the explosion of a construction-like nuclear power plant, namely that of Chernobyl, also played a decisive role in the construction freeze of the third reactor.

The independence of Lithuania caused conflicts between the inhabitants of Sniečkus and the Lithuanian authorities. Many of the Soviet monofunctional cities were seen as problematic after the collapse, not only because of their economic restructuring, but also because of the "nationality problem": previously privileged people living in the "Soviet paradise" neither understood nor supported the plans of the Lithuanian national movements to separate from the USSR. They had to choose to become Lithuanian citizens or to return to their home country.

The second phase of the development of the city began by signing the contract of 18 September 1991 between the Ministry of Nuclear Power of the USSR and the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania, which agreed the transfer of the Ignalina nuclear power plant to Lithuania's property. The nuclear power plant had a great economic benefit as it covered Lithuania's energy needs and energy could be exported to Belarus. In addition, the nuclear power plant had immense importance for the local population: as a workplace and as a founding myth, with which many identified.

Lithuania's accession to the European Union marks the third phase of the city's history. One of the conditions of the accession negotiations was the decommissioning of the Ignalina nuclear power plant on the basis of safety measures, which envisaged the closure of all Chernobyl RBMK types within the EU. Thus, both reactors, the first in 2004 and the second in 2009, were shut down as agreed. Currently, the nuclear power plant is in decommissioning, which is expected to be completed in 2038.

Visaginas is faced with the challenge of developing a vision for the city's future in order to counter the negative effects of the closure of the nuclear power plant (the abolition of jobs, the decline in the number of inhabitants by 30 per cent, an ageing population, the closure of schools and kindergartens, etc.).

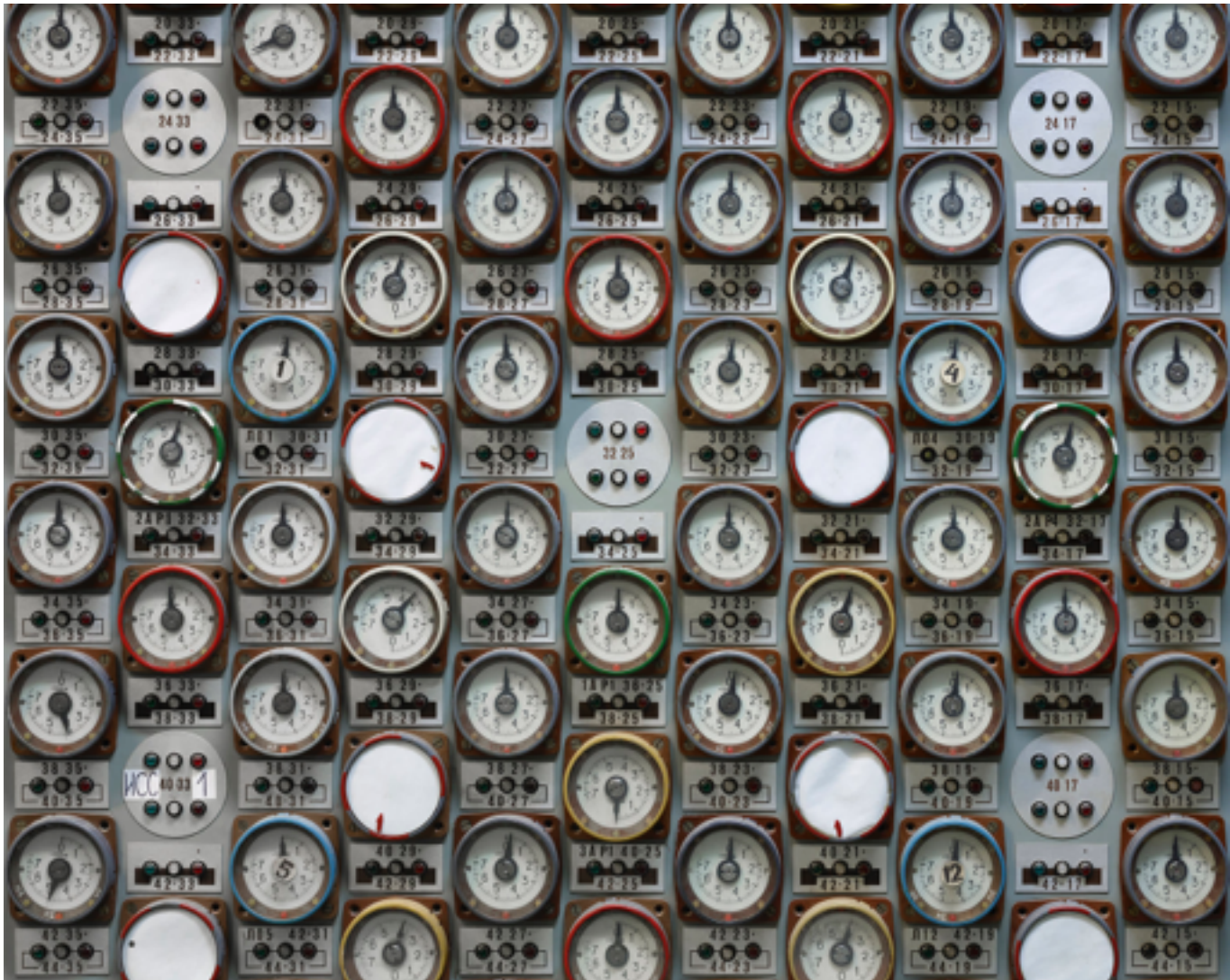
## GREEN MEADOW



“Green Meadow” (Lithuanian: “Žalia pievelė”; Russian: “Зелёный луг”) is a documentary theatre project of Lithuanian National Drama Theatre, developed by Lithuanian, German and British artists and social scientists. This project seeks to research the history of Visaginas and Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant, telling personal stories and exploring different perspectives of this area through a theatre production. By doing this, we aim to encourage dialogue between the community of Visaginas and the rest of Lithuania as well as to open up wider discussions with and among other European countries and mono-industrial communities existing within them that are already facing similar challenges or will inevitably do so in the future.



## CONTEXT



The name of the project originates from the term used in Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant *Green Meadow*, which describes the ultimate aim of its decommissioning process: to wipe out the huge architectural structure of both nuclear units as well as all auxiliary facilities, and to replace everything with flora typical to the region, completely erasing any signs of the existence of the plant.

*Green Meadow* represents a new future, a utopian place free of industrial remains and the dangers of nuclear energy, offering instead a possibility of a fresh start, a chance to build new, more sustainable structures. But equally so, it can manifest a sense of emptiness left within the plant's 5000 (former) employees, and within the 20.000 inhabitants of Visaginas, a city built with the sole purpose of supporting the plant. It also raises a single most important question: what, if anything at all, will take place on the green meadow when the plant ceases to exist?

The project raises, of course, many other questions, and by encouraging citizens of Visaginas to answer them, we also want to direct the same questions to our audience. How does it feel to be forced to destroy and remove something you have created? How do people deal with this loss? How does a city change when it loses its “mother”, the lodestone of its identity? How can places and people create new visions that address both past and present conditions, carving out livable and hopeful lives?

## HOW WE WORK



As a first step, the project created a space of debates and creative research through weekly workshops that were open to all residents between October 2016 and January 2017. In this phase, themes were examined that had relevance for the participants, such as (in-)visible power structures that shape their lives (urban architecture, radioactivity, professional development, affiliation with the community, etc.) and what decisions they make as

individuals within these power structures. This phase culminated in a public event, in which the participants described their personal relationships and experiences that connect them with the city and the nuclear power station in monologues.

In the second phase, which began in February 2017, ten participants are working on a documentary theater production together with a creative team from the Lithuanian National Drama Theater. The production is intended to reflect the different perspectives on the past, the present and the visions for the future of Visaginas and the nuclear power plant. Personal stories are linked to archival material and interviews (eg. with the architects, the designers and builders of Visaginas, experts in the field of nuclear science and dismantling). The performers are statistically (age, ethnicity, occupation) almost representative of Visagina's composition.

The show will premiere on May 9, 2017 in Visaginas and on three dates (19th, 20th and 21st May 2017) in the Small stage of the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre.

The creative project team comprises of the producer Rimantas Ribačiauskas (Lithuania), theatre and film director Jonas Tertelis (Lithuania), dramaturg and script writer Kristina Savickienė (Lithuania) and community artist Kristina Werner (Germany).

Stage design: Paule Bollucaitė, film: Elena Kairyte, sound and composition: Martynas Bialobžeskis, translation: Andrius Markevičius

The scientific partners of the project are cultural and political geographers Dr. Leila Dawney from the University of Brighton and Dr. Phil Johnstone from the University of Sussex. The creative partners are the photographers Laurie Griffiths and Jonty Tacon from the project Babochka (<http://www.babochka.co.uk>), whose images, all taken in the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant and in Visaginas, are used in this presentation with their kind permission.





The documentary play about the history of the city of Visaginas, which is inextricably linked to the nuclear power plant, deals intensively with different topics, which could be interesting for a coverage. The strong involvement of the inhabitants of Visaginas and the workers of the nuclear power plant creates a lively and stimulating atmosphere. The following topics are of particular interest:

### REASON FOR THE CLOSURE OF THE INPP

In 1992, a contract was signed between the Lithuanian government and the banks, which agreed to the closure of INPP by 2004. This contract has not been publicly published. In the EU accession negotiations the reason for the closure was the lack of safety. Despite further investment in safety measures on the part of Sweden, the EU remained the position that no RBMK reactor could be tolerated in the EU. Not far (20 km) of the Lithuanian border on the Belarusian side is now built a new nuclear power station.

## PILOT PROJECT OF A DECOMMISSIONING NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

The decommissioning of the INPP is a pilot project since none of these types have been dismantled so far. The necessary processes for such a pilot project are developed and recorded by the local staff and experts from abroad. This often leads to modifications of planning that extend the duration of the dismantling and thus also increase the costs. It is planned that dismantling will be completed in 2038.

## IDENTITY

In interviews with residents of Visaginas, an uncertainty about their identity is sensed. They feel torn in their political affiliation with the former Soviet Union, Russia, Lithuania and Europe. They are seen in Lithuania as Russians and in Russia as Lithuanians and need a visa to visit their home country. They often describe themselves as Russian-speaking Lithuanians and find their home in Visaginas. The future of Visaginas is uncertain as of the decommissioning of the nuclear power plant, the rejection of the socialist history by the municipal administration of Visaginas and the decline in the number of inhabitants.

## ISOLATION

The present socialist legacy, the geographical peripheral location, the connotation to radioactivity and the high percentage of ethnic Russians (55 per cent) isolates Visaginas from the rest of Lithuania. The absence of any Lithuanian history or settlement before 1973 reinforces this isolation, since Visaginas can fall back on nothing but socialist history. After the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the current geopolitical situation, this situation is being considered with concern in the rest of the country.

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