

Bison in the Latvian Ethnoscape: A Contingency of (not)Becoming

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Introduction

In his seminal work, *Landscapes and Memory*, Simon Schama (1995: 37), starts the chapter about the European bison (the Royal Beasts of Białowieża) with a taste of their meat, “[...] it tasted like nothing I have eaten before: a strange sweetness lurking beneath its cheesy pungency”. Indeed, hunting for meat has long defined an important aspect of human relations with this animal. Another aspect that penetrates, and, in a way, defines the human-bison relationship is the acknowledgment of their grace, majesty, special treatment, and protection, for example, by royalty in the Białowieża Forest (Baerselman, Vera 1995; Schama 1995), or currently by international regulations. Moreover, they are also a subject of awe, as this long forgotten Latvian tale suggests:

Far away a king ruled. His son was a great hunter [...] Once, accompanied, he went to hunt and arrived at a great forest abundant with game. Carried away by the heated hunt from other hunters, the prince spotted a bison and shot an arrow towards him. The bison vanished instantly, a huge wizard appeared in its place and cursed him by pointing his hand [...] (Smits 1927: 253).

On a grey and windy day in December 2014, together with the Director of Pasaules Dabas Fonds¹, Jānis Rozītis, we were out in a field in search of bison in the wild surroundings of Lake Pape (south-western Latvia). The landscape at this time of the year in the coastal lowlands is damp and muddy; ditches are full of water limiting the possibility to traverse these young, deciduous forests on foot. Within eyesight, some elk crossed the road and ditches, leaving numerous footprints, similar to the ones we were looking for. Confused by the plethora of animal footprints, we were carefully looking for other hints: noises, smells, gnawed off pieces of tree bark, etc. Yet we knew that we were wandering in a bison landscape, imagining them living there rather than truly expecting to encounter them at once. They are animals of the dusk and dawn; fast and silent, masters at remaining unseen among trees.

Although bison are large mammals, they have quite a narrow body shape enabling them to hide easily behind tree trunks. Some analogies of this can also be found in language. The word in Lithuanian

1 An NGO, former WWF-Latvia, now associated partner of WWF in Latvia (World Wide Fund For Nature).

for European bison is *stumbras*, which in kindred Latvian means tree trunk (*stumbrs*), but the name for bison in Latvian is *sumbrs* (ancient, *sūbrs*). The bison is also a meadow animal. Some excrement that we found in their former home of fenced meadows confirmed their presence in the area (as it did in the spring of 2013 during a similar quest) where they have been roaming in the wild for the past ten years.

The experimental bison (re)introduction in Pape, followed by a contingent bison escape from the enclosure, exposes yet unarticulated complexities relating to a general understandings of the bison's place in this particular landscape, and their becoming wild animals, along with social implications and broader meaning of bison becoming part of the national landscape. This research traces the bison's movements since their arrival in Pape until today, giving insight into bison cultural history in the region as well as into the ideas and meanings of rewilding itself. In particular, we aim to explore the ways in which attitudes towards bison in Pape are formed, using Deleuze and Guattari's (2014 [1987]) notion of "three kinds of animals", and the role of local human and non-human actors in shaping the bison milieu in Pape.

We used field observations, interviews with locals, park managers and nature protection experts, media content analysis, analyses of literature and documents to understand the geography and timeline of the events as well as to interpret the bison project in larger socio-political contexts. Our fieldwork was conducted from 2013–2015 when we visited Pape surroundings, including visits to the former bison enclosure and farmsteads in the local neighborhood.

An insight into the history of bison

In 1854, The Latvian Newspaper (*Latweeschu Awises*) writes that bison is the largest forest bull, which still can be seen in Lithuanian and Białowieża forests, while elsewhere it has been exterminated. This is presumably the oldest record in Latvian, published during the time when Courland was a part of the Russian empire; it describes in detail the management of the bison in Białowieża that at the time belonged to "our emperor". Could it be so that bison have roamed Courland's forests hundreds of years before, rhetorically asks the author? Yes, they had sometimes entered from Lithuanian lands, they had also been spotted in Prussia until they were all shot. And, after all, there is a Latvian name for the beast, concludes the author ([Bez aut.] 1854).

Formerly widespread throughout Europe, the European bison *Bison bonasus* became nearly extinct in the beginning of the 20th century (Balčiauskas 1999). In Holocene and early historical times, the range of European bison covered western, central and south-eastern Europe, extending up to the Volga River and the Caucasus. Since then the population of bison was subject to gradual shrinkage and fragmentation: decreasing number of individuals and the isolation of sub-populations lead to extinction (Pucek 2004).

In Latvia, bison were extant in the end of the Iron Age and throughout the Middle Ages (5th–16th century), yet the archaeological findings indicate that bison hunting remains are particularly characteristic to the Late Iron Age period (10th–12th century) in the southern parts of Latvia's territory (Bīrons et al. 1974). Afterwards, its presence in the territory of Latvia is hardly evidenced; while in captivity bison were registered in the so-called manorial deer garden (Hirschgarten) of Valmiermuiža (Wolmarshof), where a pair of bison from Białowieża was brought in the end of 19th century to enrich the animal diversity of a park created for royal hunting pleasures.

By the 18th–19th century, larger herds of European bison were found only in Białowieża, a large sparsely populated forest, which was preserved by monarchs for over 400 years (Samojlik 2005). Due to the protection measures of the royal game, the number of bison grew up there to almost two thousand in the 1850s, but by the end of the century only 380 animals were left there (Morris 2015); then the population increased again by 1915 to approximately 785 animals (Ricciuti 1974). War and post-war chaos lead to uncontrolled poaching of bison; during World War I, around 600 bison were killed, mainly for meat, leather, and horns, but after the retreat of German soldiers only nine bison had survived (Ricciuti 1974). Eventually, in 1919 a poacher shot the last European bison in Białowieża Forest. In 1929, efforts were initiated to reintroduce bison on the basis of a handful individuals, which were saved in a few European zoological gardens (Samojlik 2005). Nowadays, Białowieża is the only lowland primeval forest left in Europe—around 900 bison roam freely there (Deinet et al. 2013).

The history of bison in Latvia, which have long been absent from the national landscape, can be disclosed only through scrupulous archaeological research or folk studies, whereas in the neighbouring country of Lithuania bison became extinct much later in the 17th century (Kibiša et al. 2017). The reintroduction of bison in Lithuania—bison has been known to be the animal of the ancient Lithuanian State (Bonda 2013)—began in 1969, and the first bison were set free in the wild in 1973 (Balčiauskas 1999). Since 2003, the size of their population has rapidly increased, and there are currently nearly 200 bison (Kibiša et al. 2017).

The idea of a wilderness with large herbivores

In Latvia, the idea of wilderness that precedes our bison story stems from World Wildlife Fund (WWF) -Latvia's initiative in the late 1990s aimed at restoring the pre-agricultural landscape with its shifting mosaic of open land and forests, continuously reshaped through natural disturbances of fire, wind, grazing, and predation. This wilderness was established within Pape Nature Park, composing the landscapes of wetlands and migrating birds, natural meadows grazed by Konik horses and auroxen, and European bison that also inhabited the park's forests. However, the acceptance of the idea at the beginning of the 2000s proved to be controversial here, because, according to the spokesman of the Latvian Fund for Nature, Jānis Priednieks,

The introduction of the Konik horses signified that ‘an enormous territory [had] been taken out’ of the Latvian landscape; that the nationally iconic Latvian farmer had been driven off the land, to no good purpose, by ‘animals of fairly bizarre genetic origins’ (Schwartz 2005: 293).

Indeed, wilderness, in the sense it is used in Anglo-American understandings, is not a word found in the Latvian vocabulary. Latvians, going back to the ancient Balts, have always fought for the land, slashed and burned “dark forests” and reclaimed impassable wetlands, transforming and maintaining the land to render it usable for dwelling. This even applied to lands with poor and sandy soils as well as to areas with articulated topography or marshes. The whole national narrative of an iconic ethnoscape, as it is for any of non-industrial nations, was built upon the ideals of peasantry (e.g. Skultans 2001)—the Latvian as a ploughman in folk culture, “masters of our own land” in the years of national awakening from the mid-19th century and onwards, and productivist agriculture as national business during the years of the country’s first national independence. As a social construct, the wilderness occurred perhaps as an idea of untouched nature preserved for scientific purposes during the Soviet period when strictly off-limits nature reserves were established. They were small and discrete, open to scientists, but not accessible and of interest at all to the general public.

This wilderness, however, was something new. According to the former WWF-Latvia Director, Uģis Rotbergs, this idea was based on new values regarding grazing animals as landscape inhabitants and the main caretakers of land, with the whole area functioning as a demonstration site for economic, ecological, and social benefits that would come from the reintroduction of large herbivores. Together with the neighbouring village, Pape Village of Rucava and the whole of Rucava County were always considered to be historically unique and rich in material and immaterial ethnographic values. At Rucava, locals would have held with the idea of basing tourism on local ethnographic traditions and everyday life. As Schwartz observed, in the minds of many, this vision of heritage tourism directly conflicted with the western vision of wilderness-based ecotourism. To locals, unrestrained nature “was nothing more than worthless ‘jungle’, unfit for human enjoyment unless redeemed through cultivation” (Schwartz 2005: 310).

Taking place: bison arrival and exodus

The landscape of Lake Pape’s surroundings was redeemed, in fact, through cultivation during the productivism era of the mid–20th century (Zariņa et al. 2018). On the dump lands with naturally limited agricultural potential the Pape polder (515 ha) was engineered at the end of the 1960s. The polder was seen as a solution for redeeming the kolkhoz’s weak subsistence, and, indeed, both then and now providing the locals with extra, albeit still poor, agricultural lands. The natural habitats in and around Lake Pape (a Ramsar site since 2004) were considerably transformed by various forms of drainage over the course of the 20th century (van de Vlasakker, 2006).



Figure 1. Bison arrive at their enclosure in Pape polder in 2004 (photo: Pasaules Dabas fonds).

As a relatively marginal location, Pape attracted WWF-Latvia because of its nature potential (lagoonal lake and migratory bird site, raised peat bog, wet meadows, and vast forest areas) and its depopulated landscape. In Lake Pape immediate surroundings, just 15–20 residents lived in farmsteads, while the small village of Pape comprised only a few permanent inhabitants. A regional newspaper promoted the WWF-Latvia’s vision of the future landscape pictured as the one from a thousands of years long past, “[...] it will be as a view from yore—in a lush meadow wild horses will roam, from a thicket bison would leer, while sky would traverse a skein of cranes. Would there be a place for man?” (Tišheizere 2002: 7).

Nineteen Konik horses arrived at Pape in 1999. During the next project phase in 2004, Pasaules Dabas fonds brought the first 5 European bison (Figure 1) and 24 auroxen. Another 12 bison arrived from Poland and the Netherlands in 2006. The bison were released in an enclosure built on the before mentioned polder lands; soon after this, an observation tower and information stand for tourists were installed there. All things considered, the arrival of bison, in particular, was an event of national importance: up to 100 people attended the great opening of the enclosure (among them were representatives of the media, stakeholders, and locals). Back then, the local newspaper wrote that “[...] the reintroduction of herbivores will be the most challenging and best investment in the landscape; both environmentally friendly and utmost sustainable” (Ceplenece 2003: 16-17). Before the reintroduction, the project’s inquiry data demonstrated that more than a half of Pape’s population supported the project. Their expectations were related to tourism development and new job opportunities, etc. Yet this attitude partly changed as soon as the bison agency intervened in the private lives of locals. Bison left their grazing area twice (in 2006 and 2009); the second time no longer returning to their enclosure. The media declared quite clearly at that time (Viksne 2009a, Viksne 2009b) that the bison project in Pape had been unsuccessful.

What caused the bison to leave this place? In human-related terms, we would characterize this “escape” as evacuation or exodus, because the bison were, in fact, fleeing from the wet and sometimes even flooded grounds that were caused by the malfunctioning polder. As park managers noted, the second time the escape itself was rather an effort—they had crawled under the bottom of a broken fence and swum across the polder canal. Various experts, before and after the escape, acknowledged the unsuitability of the place for bison. Jānis Ozoliņš, a zoologist at the Latvian State Forest Research Institute Silava in 2003 commented the forthcoming project:

There are strict rules for breeding bison in captivity [...]. Particularly, the safety precautions regarding the enclosures must be considered, because these animals can be aggressive. The release of bison into the wild would be a crazy experiment. An ecological expertise is definitely needed here. [...].

On the same page was Jānis Priednieks, the director of the Department of Zoology and Ecology at the Faculty of Biology, saying:

In Latvia, there are no suitable biotopes, necessary food base or living space for bison, especially in the poor surroundings of Lake Pape. They need broadleaf forests. [...] These animals need a proper fence, because they cannot be allowed to go into the wild (Zemberga 2003: 37).

Essentially, the malfunctioning polder played a key role in the whole process of bison eventual returning to Latvia’s landscape, which was set by a chain of relational contingencies between human and non-human actors. Another question is the suitability of the place itself. In the socio-ecological assessment of the potential European bison habitat, Kuemmerle et al. (2011) have acknowledged Latvia as suitable for bison populations. However, in

Pape no ecological assessment had been performed prior to the bison's arrival; there is also no monitoring of their movements; no particular laws or guidelines for their conservation or management have been issued so far. From the point of view of the State, the bison are almost non-existent. Yet there they are, having last been seen on October 13, 2018 by early morning travellers. The ecological conditions of the place itself, apparently, are not paramount to measure the suitability for bison in the contemporary landscape. Rather, the relational formations between human and non-human actors and events taking place, as well as human and society's attitudes (e.g. the State, locals, stakeholders) are the ones that may determine bison's potentiality in Latvia's landscape in general. As Kuemmerle et al. (2011) state, in contemporary conservation planning, moving from bioclimatic niche models toward broadscale habitat models is a necessary step to restore the ecological roles of large herbivores in human-dominated landscape. With this in mind, we must have a closer look at people's modes of relating to these animals.

Three kinds of animals

Essentially, this bison project involves much more than (re)introduction, a local developmental asset or locals' disapproval and eventual acceptance. It is a precedent of becoming a bison, that is, a tamed animal becoming a wild animal, likely a place becoming a place with bison in it. In human geography, becoming designates a process-based movement, in which the world is conceived of as a dynamic and open-ended set of relational transformations (McCormack 2009). Deleuze uses the term "becoming" to describe the continual production of difference intrinsic to the constitution of events whether they are physical or otherwise (Stagoll 2005). If we consider "becoming" as "pure movement" between particular events, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest (*ibid.*), we can trace "bison becoming" as relational to the events that triggered and changed bison and their movements in this particular story. However, we will not speak here of bison "becoming" as such or some inherent characteristics of bison themselves; instead we will discuss people's modes of relating to these animals. To illustrate this, by using the examples from Pape and elsewhere, we will employ Deleuze and Guattari's (2014 [1987]) idea of there being three kinds of animals of which only the third kind is capable of becoming.

First, there are individuated animals, family pets, sentimental ones that invite us to regress and draw us into narcissistic contemplation (Deleuze, Guattari 2014 [1987]). These were bison during the phase of their transfer to Latvia, the ones carefully selected and transported, the ones people were willing to see and feed in their enclosure. They occupied approximately 70 ha of territory covered partly by meadows and partly by forest, and because of the latter, they were not always visible to observers. Gradually adapting to the place and people, these bison became more secure to come out of the wooded area, yet still keeping the distance from the visitors. "The bison, although they arrived only this year, slept calmly in the distance. It was a rainy October day, but our group watched those unusual animals

with great pleasure and admiration”, wrote a local newspaper (Jansone 2004). Eventually, becoming unalarmed by people, the bison even approached the fence with visitors behind it, “sometimes we even tried to feed them bread from our hands...” recalls a local woman, who years later came face to face with them in her backyard. The local and even national media followed the implementation of the project, scrupulously describing the bison’s adaptation to people and place. Even when they were already outside the fence, roaming quietly in the fields, sleeping for hours in the backyards of some farmsteads, some locals regarded them with sentiment, as disoriented animals that were the part of a project that failed because of human negligence.

Currently, bison in captivity in Latvia are encountered only in two privately owned parks in Vidzeme Region: the deer park Zemitāni (a deer farm and safari park), which, in its 300 ha area, holds a large number of animals, among which there are more than 1200 deer, but also moufflons, wild boar and European bison. However, of 17 bison at the beginning of the 2010s, only one is left there for various reasons, among which, as the park manager Vasiļonoks notes, prevailed the territorial management and breeding issues. This free-range safari park, on the one hand, is like a fairy forest—that is how the official site of the Latvia Travel Agency ([Bez aut.] S.a.) describes it; on the other hand, it is also a hunting park (Hirschgarten), similar to the ones in manorial times: the hunter’s club Hiršenhofa (a word play with German Hirsch and Hof would mean a manor of deer) is also established there. Three bison from Zemitāni are now owned by a private estate, perhaps, of with similar purposes to the ones during the manorial time. At Līgatne Nature Trail (an open-plan zoo of indigenous fauna) of Gauja National Park, a pair of bison was brought there from Białowieża during the Soviet period in 1984; they eventually died of natural causes (the last one died in 2012). Now, the park represents only the indigenous fauna and, regardless the requests from visitors, they have abandoned the idea of reintroducing bison there again. This denotes the official position of the State, that is, the Nature Conservation Agency.

The second kind of animal is the one with characteristics or attributes; genus, classification; or animals as they are treated in the great divine myths (Deleuze, Guattari 2014 [1987]). For example, they might serve a purpose for science or idea. In this sense, bison (as well as tarpans and auroxen) represent the idea of the restoration of the pre-agricultural landscape. They serve also as a particular trademark for Pasaules Dabas Fonds as an institution understanding and supporting the Western narratives of reintroduction, biodiversity, and wilderness. But for Latvia it meant even more than that. It was an attempt to question and dispute landscape developmental paths, based on conventional yet contestable ethnoscape values, particularly in depopulated areas. As Schwartz (2005: 313) described, it was “the first step in teaching Latvians to look beyond the limits of the agrarian paradigm and to see relatively ‘wild’ nature as a new kind of developmental asset”. Indeed, since 1999 such wilderness territories have increased in ranging from one to eight in various places in Latvia (Reķe et al. 2019). However, the predominant attitude of the public and experts have remained the same, favouring the icons of the ethnoscape, as a result of which even now a constructive dialogue has not been possible. This deals with not only eco-tourism or western nature values, but also with changes in the whole system of the function and meaning of marginalized landscapes in Latvia.

As the Deleuzian second kind of animal bison is also the State animal. And here we must speak particularly about Lithuania, Poland, and the former Russian Empire; and, nowadays, also about Belarus with bison as their national animal. After all, as Samojlik (2005: 87) has put it, bison, due to the monarchs' protection, have become "a living relic of the time of Kings". Schama (1995: 41) performed an apt account on the bison's historical meaning for the Lithuanian-Polish realm at the time, writing, "the bison was as important to the Lithuanian-Polish cult of knighthood as the bull was for Spanish warrior caste". In the significant poem of Hussovianus (also Hussowski—a poet and catholic priest of Grand Duchy of Lithuania), *A Song about the Appearance, Savagery and Hunting of the Bison*, dedicated to Pope Leo X to satisfy his desire to know more about European bison (Bonda 2013), the animal, writes Schama (1995: 41), "was depicted as a miraculous relic of a presocial, even prehistoric past—a tribal, arboreal world of hunters and gatherers, at the same time frightening and admirable". Even more than that, the whole poem was, regardless of its title, in fact, a historical and social account about the ancient Lithuanian state and its regents (Bonda 2013). After all, another common name for European bison is Lithuanian bison (e.g. Schama 1995).

The European bison is also a species on the IUCN Red List—declared as a vulnerable species with a currently increasing population trend (Olech 2008). For human-bison relationships, such institutional status of bison in the wild Pape surroundings settles tense situations, particularly in relation to local hunter community. Bison, which were used to people, freely roamed from one farmstead to another, from a wildlife-feeding place to a field with fodder for livestock, creating unprecedented dissatisfaction for locals, and the overall project's critique from nature protection experts. Nevertheless, this set of relational transformations of human attitude towards bison led to what many now acknowledge as the proper "bison return to Latvia's landscape"

Third, the behaviour of bison in the yards of locals for about a year after their escape created numerous conflicts that eventually ceased along with the bison's retreat into the forest—the wild. Some locals perceived bison as giants or devils who had escaped from fairy tales. "I have not grown up with them [...] I go out in the yard and there's huge livestock [...] a huge cow with hair". This is how the contact with bison was described by a local woman during our first field visit in 2013. The first encounters with bison, thus, may be described as symptomatic of fear and danger of the foreign and unfamiliar: fear for children walking on their own, fear of a sudden encounter, fear for their properties, etc. Indeed, there are lots of stories about fearful, destructive and somewhat comical encounters: a boy running away from a bison on the way from his school, a man passing by an enraged bison with recently delivered offspring, trampling down lawns and croplands, gnawing at an apple tree's bark, licking the windows of a house, creating minor disorder in someone's barn, and other such incidents.

Yet some human kindness towards the bison shone through the majority of these stories. It seemed that, in a way, they understood the world of this at that time perplexed animal; perhaps because at the time of these inquiries, the bison were already out of their everyday landscapes. However, during the most heated discussions amidst the first conflicts, local men were ready to "hunt them down immediately" (Pujēna 2007: 5). More than that, as it turned out, the most dissatisfied section of the locals in Pape are hunter communities, because the

bison partly feed at feeding places meant for game. The local hunters, however, cannot hunt bison because of their legal status in the Red Book and because of the overall uncertainty of the status of bison in the Latvia's law

Years later, a similar story took place in Latgale (the southeastern region of Latvia), when a solitary bison crossed the border with Belarus and roamed quietly in the local farmsteads, apparently used to people and their assistance. It sometimes followed some livestock herds, sometimes slept in gardens, and, of course, created also some disorders in yards. People tried to keep off the bison from their properties by throwing stones, brandishing sticks, or driving towards it on their tractors. It was going on until one of the farmers decided to take the bison in his care with the future intentions to settle this bison in an enclosure constructed on one of his forest properties (Jonāne 2018, Blass 2017).

However, we can talk about Pape's bison as a third kind of animal, the “more demonic animals, pack or affect animals that form a multiplicity, a becoming, a population, a tale...” (Deleuze, Guattari 2014 [1987]: 281), only after their retreat to forest, that is, when they faced the deadly encounters with people. Lorimer et al. (2019) use the term “animals' affective atmospheres”, which can be shaped by changing wider political ecological dynamics: for instance, landscapes torn apart by poaching can generate “traumatic” circumstances (Bradshaw 2009). For the bison, the real trigger for becoming wild animals—avoiding people and living without their assistance—was the precedent of poaching, perhaps followed by more than this one, as Lake Pape Project Manager Mednis, as well as local rumours, suggest.

Bison as a third kind of animal, from the perspective of human relation to it, is the animal that can be also hunted. The tales of bison hunting were particularly vividly described in the media during the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th century, when territorial links with Białowieża were sustained through the bounds of Russian empire. For example, a hunting magazine ([Bez aut.] 1928) published an account of a royal hunt in Białowieża in 1860, which was organized by the court of Alexander II involving a lot of preparations (this includes about 2000 peasants to encircle the hunting grounds); 28 bison among other animals were hunted down. This is how F. A. Glinsky depicted the bison hunt:

[...] Howling and barking of dogs that resemble a hellish music, indicates the nearing of bison. The beaters stop at a designated spot and dead silence befalls the forest once again. But soon one can hear as if trees are cracking and branches breaking, and soon enough a huge shaggy head with two horns turns up from the thicket, then another one till the whole pack of bison appears. As if realizing that the silence that came after this hellish noise does not mean anything good—the bison stop. Their bloodshot eyes inflame with wildness. The leader of the pack lifts his head high in the air, all of his limbs and muscles are strained, and each posture shows the forest king's commitment to sell his skin at the highest cost possible. But when the bison notice the crowd around them, they suddenly decide to retreat trying to break through the row of beaters. Hundreds of shots that are charged only with powder fall upon them. Bison then rush forward again, where they receive the hunters' bullets. Bison rarely falls from one bullet [...]



Figure 2. The pack of eight bison in the surroundings of Pape in an early morning of October 2015 (Photo: Gaston Lacombe, a courtesy of Pasaules Dabas fonds).

The culling of bison nowadays, for example, in Poland takes place in order to regulate local bison populations and for the sake of bison habitat; mainly because in most of free-living populations the European bison have no natural predators (Pucek et al. 2002). The authors also admit that the regulation of bison by selling hunting licenses for the shooting of a protected species is legally and ethically ambiguous. However, as a journalist for the *Geographical* sharply remarks (Stacy 2017), although commercial hunting of bison is not currently allowed by Polish law, a quick Internet search for “Bison hunting Europe” brings up several outfits offering hunters the chance to shoot wild bison in Poland (the same can be said about Belarus). The hunting websites also display a variety of photographs with hunted down bison during these so-called trophy hunts.

In Latvia, trophy hunting of bison certainly is not on agenda for now, nor for the near future. However, in a situation when an animal, regardless of its protective status, would become danger of death to locals, it can be hunted down immediately, without consulting the Nature Conservation Agency. Having said this, we can only speculate what has happened to the rest of bison from the Pape enclosure.

We will not observe Pape's bison roaming near human yards and gardens during daytime anymore, not even on adjacent roads and fields. Lodgers, for instance, may see bison only occasionally during early morning hours on the edge of the deep woods (Figure 2). While hunters would trace their footprints around feeding places and some locals would observe them here and there by accident. The remaining pack of five bison now roam an area of approximately 500 ha, following familiar paths, one of which is their former enclosure.

Conclusion

To humans, Pape's landscape inhabited by bison is not something wilder than it was before when in particular instances human dwelling-worlds met with those of wild boars, wolves, or elk. This, however, signifies a precedent that has changed the perspective for the potentiality of the wilderness in the landscape. Pape's landscape is still in the process of becoming a landscape with bison, with no units of measurement for understanding its success or failure. Nevertheless, the wild bison in Pape can be regarded rather as an epiphenomenon of this rewilding project, brought into existence due to the set of relational interactions among nature potential in Pape, the Soviet landscape alterations (the polder) and current post-productivist landscape management, land owners and managers, wider politics (including the conflicting interests between nature protection and agricultural subsidies) and local interests, local residents, various interest groups (families with small children, small-scale farmers, hunters, tourists, nature protection institutions), the media, and national discourses. But also, since Latvia's territory is located in such close geographical proximity to the heart of bison rewilding projects in Lithuania, Poland, and Belarus, Latvia's State should reconsider their position towards this majestic animal that once was part of Latvia's history.

The bison precedent in Pape, in a way, rendered it possible for a space to be shared with, and occupied by, an animal long absent in Latvia's landscape. It also becomes a symbol of the multiple possibilities of the wilderness, changing inevitably the institutional thought embedded within the system of conventional landscape values. Although the constructed and desired wilderness as the face or idea of a new landscape in Latvia today is still inside the fence, the openings in its walls are there to be found.

We would like to close this bison story with a remark, heard at the Latvia's Radio 4 program *Noev Kovcheg* (Čera 2019), where a zoologist and nature protection expert Vilnis Skuja, talking about the moose in Latvia (it is declared the animal of the year 2019), mentions that the moose is, actually, the second largest animal here. "But who is the first then?", asks the surprised journalist, "the bison", quickly answers Skuja with confidence and some kind of satisfaction in his voice.

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Sumbri Latvijas etnoainavā: tapšanas (ne)iespējamība

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Atslēgvārdi: savvaļas veidošana, lielle zālējais, cilvēku-dzīvnieku attiecības, sumbru vēsture, dzīvnieku studijas

Sumbri šodienas ainavā Papes apkārtnē ir daļa no lielo zālējāju (re) introdukcijas projekta, kas tika īstenots 21. gadsimta pašā sākumā un kura iecere bija saistīta ar jaunas savvaļas ainavas veidošanu marginālās lauksaimniecības zemēs Papes Dabas parkā. Nejaušības un dažādu apstākļu sakrītību rezultātā sumbri izkļuva no aploka un pamazām pielāgojās dzīvei savvaļā. No vienas puses, rakstā uzmanība tiek pievērsta sumbru tapšanai par savvaļas dzīvniekiem un ar to saistītiem notikumiem un dažādām mijattiecībām, kuras noteica gan nacionāla mēroga pārmaiņas sociāli ekonomiskajā situācijā, konfliktējošie dabas diskursi un to ietekme, gan lokāla mēroga zemes apsaimniekošanas konflikti un vietējo iedzīvotāju attieksme. No otras, rakstā tiek aplūkota izpratne par sumbru vietu Latvijas ainavā vēsturiski un šodien, interpretēta sabiedrības līdzdalība šīs izpratnes potenciāla veidošanā un īstenošanā un vispārināts Papes piemērs etnoainavas vērtību kontekstā. Cilvēka-sumbra attiecību aspekti ir aplūkoti Deleza un Gvatari “trīs veida dzīvnieku” un tapšanas jēdziena kontekstā, analizējot dažādas cilvēka idejas par sumbriem un to reprezentāciju, kā arī konkrētu vietas apstākļu un notikumu lomā sumbru savvaļas ainavas veidošanā Papes apkārtnē.