

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Central European Comparative Studies (CECS)

**Czechoslovak Housing Estates  
in the Late Socialism:  
Ideology, Practice, and Criticism**

Master thesis

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**Year of the defence:** 2019

## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
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Prague

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## References

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## **Abstract**

Czechoslovak housing estates built in the last two decades of state-socialism can be viewed as a socialist spatial entity with its own uniqueness and local characteristics specific to the circumstances of socialist Czechoslovakia during the “normalisation” era. These housing estates appeared from the beginning of the 1970s in big cities such as in Prague and Bratislava provided a new kind of living space for the residents. The ideas behind the creation of these estates were not only related to their physical appearance which shows the direct connection to modernist architecture, but also the aspiration of socialist ideologues to make a positive change in the name of socialist modernisation. Although the post-war socialist centralization of the Czechoslovak state and architectural practice endorses the notion of collective endeavour, the construction of housing estates for all as a part of the “building of socialism” program was attacked by contemporary critiques as providing the premises for the citizens’ retreat into the private sphere. These estates could be argued to have caused a psychological impact and worked to shape a new lifestyle and mentality of the residents whose lives epitomized the main theme of normalisation-era: the quiet lives away from politics. Different poles of criticism to which large-scale housing estates were subjected during the late socialism (the 1970s and 1980s) can be perceived as a part of the dissident movement, with “velvet” tactics that culminated into the “velvet” end of socialism in Czechoslovakia in 1989, and therefore, can be placed within the context of the broader political and intellectual climate of their time (Post-modernism, and Neo-liberalism).

## **Abstrakt**

Na československá sídliště postavená v posledních dvou desetiletích socialismu lze nahlížet jako na socialistickou prostorovou entitu s vlastní jedinečností a místními charakteristikami, které jsou specifické pro okolnosti období „normalizace“. Myšlenky vzniku těchto sídlišť se netýkaly pouze jejich fyzického vzhledu, který ukazuje přímé spojení s modernistickou architekturou, ale také snahy o pozitivní změnu ve jménu socialistické modernizace. Ačkoli poválečná socialistická centralizace československého státu a architektonická praxe podporuje koncepci kolektivního úsilí, výstavba sídlišť pro všechny v rámci programu „budování socialismu“ byla současnými kritikami napadena, protože

poskytla prostor pro občany ustupující do soukromé sféry. Mohlo by se argumentovat, že tyto majetky způsobily psychologický dopad a utvářely nový druh životního stylu a mentality obyvatel, jejichž životy ztělesňovaly hlavní téma éry normalizace: tichý život od politiky. Jako součást disidentského hnutí lze považovat různé póly kritiky, jimž byly vystaveny rozsáhlé sídliště během sedmdesátých a osmdesátých let, se „sametovou“ taktikou, která vyvrcholila „sametovým“ koncem socialismu v Československu v roce 1989, a proto může být umístěno do kontextu širšího politického a intelektuálního klimatu své doby (postmodernismus a neoliberalismus).

## **Keywords**

Czechoslovakia, Housing Estates, Architecture, Modernism, Normalisation, Late Socialism, Communism, Ideology, Criticism, Film, Art, Dissident

## **Klíčová slova**

Československo, Sídliště, Architektura, Modernismus, Normalizace, Pozdní Socialismus, Komunismus, Ideologie, Kritika, Film, Umění, Disident

## **Title**

**Czechoslovak Housing Estates in the Late Socialism: Ideology, Practice, and Criticism**

## **Název práce**

**Československá sídliště v pozdním socialismu: ideologie, praxe a kritika.**

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## Introduction

Large-scale housing estates constructed during post-war Czechoslovakia acted as an important element of the societal transformation during the state-socialism. Nowadays, they form the most visible architectural and urban legacy of the old regime, ranking among “the most controversial and contradictory legacies of the recent past.”<sup>1</sup> In Prague and Bratislava from the early post-war years, these new residential high-density districts began to surround the central urban areas largely dominated by low-rise buildings. Unlike those housing estates in Western Europe, these estates were much larger in size. The plans for the housing estates in Prague and Bratislava built during the 1970s differed from those that existed before in the way that they postulated that the new residential complexes were to be built on “blank green fields” separated from the already existed urban areas, with full public services and sufficient working opportunities for the residents. This idea of independently functioning city reflects a vision of the “Utopian city” as proposed by inter-war Modernist architectures like Le Corbusier and Karel Teige, the kind of city that would work as a well-oiled machine that could run smoothly on its own. This kind of dwellings is interesting as it could not be viewed through older spatial concepts of “city,” “town,” or “suburb,” and that it constituted a “new species” of housing environment in Czechoslovakia at the time they were built.<sup>2</sup>

In the post-socialist era, these housing estates located in now separated states of the Czech Republic and Slovakia have lost their exceptional status they held in the public mind under socialism. These socialist-era housing estates are usually considered as the less attractive part of the housing stock, a depressing feature of the suburbs, with many negatively viewing them as “rabbit-hutches” or “cement deserts.”<sup>3</sup> Monotonous, greyish, and over-scaled, these are the most notable negative characteristics of the large-scale high-rise multi-storey blocks of flats constructed of prefabricated concrete panels, particularly those that

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<sup>1</sup> Martina F. Koukalová, “Beautiful Boxes or Technocratic Grey? Towards a Periodic Definition of Czech Housing Estates Using the Example of Prague,” *Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities* 2 (2019), 168.

<sup>2</sup> Jiří Musil’s remark in 1982 quoted in Lucie Skřivánková; Rostislav Švácha; Irena Lehkoživová, *The Paneláks: Twenty-Five Housing Estates in the Czech Republic* (Prague: Museum of Decorative Arts, 2017), 266.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 252; The term “cement deserts” is from the poem *Jižní Město* (2011) by Jiří Žáček in Stephan Delbos (ed.), *From a Terrace in Prague: A Prague Poetry Anthology* (Amazon Media EU: Litteraria Pragensia, 2015).

began their constructions during the 1970s, the decade which is largely associated with the peak of the infamous policy of “Normalisation” in socialist Czechoslovakia. Paradoxically, the remarkable architectural vision, originally proposed as an effective solution to free the masses from urban misery was to later become something similar to what Max Weber referred to as an “iron cage” of bureaucracy, rational structures and attempt at technocratic control.<sup>4</sup> In many ways, during the Cold War era, the influence of the opinions of many contemporary Western European critics towards large-scale public housing estates allowed for skewed opinions of the Czechoslovak critics towards the material and social conditions of the residents of Czechoslovak housing estates. This has been largely supported by the widespread focus, both in popular and academic discourses, on the injustices of the Communist regime which were imposed on the Czechoslovak citizens. The judgments on these housing estates from critics, both during and after 1989, usually stem from the circumstances of their making, by the Communists during the peak time of Communist rigidity, they therefore must be viewed as bad and unacceptable, the kind of view that is firmly inscribed into the old ideological framework inherited from the Cold War era.

With regard to the existing researches on the topic of large-scale housing estates in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, great concerns on the present situations and the future development and renovation (or destruction) of these estates have largely obscured a critical aspect of historical transitions and the experiences of those who lived through such transitions.<sup>5</sup> Discussions of economic issues related to the housing markets have taken precedence over the topic of historio-spatial change (or continuity). This kind of future-oriented approach is well founded and legitimate as it potentially leads to social reforms. Nonetheless, the historio-spatial evolution of these housing estates is phenomenal and worth revisiting if we want to effectively bridge the past with the future, and to debunk the myth of “Panel Stories” told mostly by the critics of Communism. Crucially, the perspective of the general population on the Czechoslovak phenomenon of *Sídliště* (*Sídlisko* in Slovak) is firmly and notoriously tied to the post-war socialisation of architecture by the Communist

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<sup>4</sup> Max Weber, Peter Lassman (ed.), (Trans), *Weber: Political Writings (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought)* (Cambridge UP: Ronald Speirs, 1994), xvi.

<sup>5</sup> See for examples Tadeja Zupančič, Sonja Ifko, Alenka Fikfak, Matevž Juvančič, Špela Verovšek (ed.) *Manual of wise management, Preservation, Reuse and Economic valorization of Architecture of Totalitarian Regimes of the 29<sup>th</sup> Century* (Municipality of Forli and University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Architecture, Media Print Gostic, 2013); Maria Topolčanská, *Fake cities/True Stories parallel Realities in Central European Urbanity Before and After 1990* (Bratislava: Slovak Technical University in Bratislava, 2012).

government which sacrificed aesthetics to engineering, function and economy. This myth can be explained and challenged by re-examining the circumstances behind the making of these estates.

Several English language publications have dealt with the topic of the architectural and engineering practices of Czechoslovak housing estates built in the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> With regard to the construction of housing estates in the post-1968 era, most scholars tend to reduce this period which lasted until around the mid-1980s to that associated with “Normalisation” and the related term “Technocracy,” placing this period within the so-called the “Technocratic Phase.”<sup>7</sup> The background and a thorough analysis of this phase of housing construction is usually neglected in part due to the apparent and acute downward spiral in architectural aesthetic and quality of those estates, arguably the direct consequence of political and economic restrictions. These “Technocratic” housing estates, however, represented (and still represent nowadays) one of the most important segments of the housing stock in Czech and Slovak lands, particularly that in Prague and Bratislava. To reduce them either to a kind of undesirable Communist cultural products or to a kind of “neutral” space for living in without looking at the circumstances behind their makings, is the same as to forget the rich history of a large portion of lives of Czechoslovak citizens, both those who lived through the first decade after the construction of these estates during the last decade of state-socialism (both the residents and the onlookers), and many of those who involved in the planning process of these grand projects.

This research will bridge this historical gap by looking specifically at the ideological rhetoric behind the making of these technocratic estates, and the lived experiences of those people who lived in them, as well as the “muted” and “automatic” functionings of the “physical” environment of these estates on the mentality of the residents. The research will demonstrate how Czechoslovak *Sídlišťe* of the technocratic phase was the ground both for

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<sup>6</sup> See for examples Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*; Jiří Musil, “Housing policy and the sociospatial structure of cities in a socialist country: the example of Prague,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 11: 1 (March 1987), 27-36. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2427.1987.tb00033.x; Jiří Musil, “City development in Central and Eastern Europe before 1990: Historical context and socialist legacies,” in Hamilton FEI, Andrews KD, Pichler-Milanović N. (eds.), *Transformation of cities in Central and Eastern Europe: towards globalization* (Tokyo-New York: United Nations University Press, 2005), 22-43; Kimberly Elman Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1960* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> The name of this time-period “The Technocratic Phase” is coined by Martina Flekačevá in Flekačevá, “*Beautiful Boxes or Technocratic Grey*,” 23.

the actual realisation of the long-term aspirations of the modernist-functional planner and socialist ideologues, as well as for direct and indirect criticisms formulated by different actors in the society within the context of “Normalisation” and late socialist time. These critics, whom we can call “the critics of *Sídliště*,” and the nature of their attacks are mostly forgotten as they were put behind the spotlight of those “dissidents” who mostly voiced their attacks on socialist system using political rhetoric related to other popular issues of their time such as the fight for freedom of speech, human rights, and the end to the political repression. The implicit protesting gestures of the critics of *Sídliště*, though neither so subversive nor politically neutral, were hard to decipher as they were disguised within the climate of Normalisation-era. This does not mean that their critiques were insignificant as part of the popular forces that culminated into the collapse of socialist system in Czechoslovakia.

This research will try to debunk the myth that late socialist *Sídliště* was a direct product of Communist ideas which were imposed on the Czechoslovak citizens from elsewhere, and at the same time, explain how the phenomenon of *Sídliště* was not merely a manifestation of totalitarian politics, or in particular, Czechoslovak “normalisation,” a kind of reasoning that reduces architecture to one-dimensional reflections. It contends that this new kind of housing environment from the early 1970s in Czechoslovak big cities was a consequence of complex and paradoxical historical trajectories. The intention of this research is not only to demonstrate “what happened” in the last two decades of the state-socialism in Czechoslovakia within the domain of mass housing and its critiques, but it would also allow us to ask ourselves again what kind of society we want to build, how it should be built, and what kind of housing environment that most of us and our future generations would like to live in.

## Research Questions

The main big question that this research seeks to answer is “what happened” in the last two decades of socialist Czechoslovakia within the domain of large-scale housing estates that made them become so much criticised? In order to answer this question, could this phenomenon of “technocratic phase” *Sídliště* be analysed and explained by combining available theories taken from different academic fields? How was this phenomenon linked to the political and economic circumstances of the late socialism as well as within the wider historical context? Was there any critique against this type of housing during the socialist time, and if so, how did those critics voice their critical opinions?

## Research Hypotheses

Czechoslovak *Sídliště* of the technocratic phase or those built in the last two decades of state-socialism can be viewed as a socialist spatial entity with its own uniqueness and local characteristics specific to the circumstances of socialist Czechoslovakia during the “Normalisation” era. Historical processes of urbanisation, architectural and socialist modernization, and social transformation which entered a zenith phase in Czechoslovakia during the 1970s, were experienced by ordinary citizens in everyday life in the domain of mass housing which “mutedly” acted on the mentality of the residents. These *Sídliště* in big cities such as in Prague and Bratislava brought a new kind of living space to the residents who moved into them during the 1970s and the 1980s. The effects culminated into a new kind of lifestyle of the residents that epitomised the main theme of the Normalisation-era: the retreat into the private sphere. The thesis aims at situating the architecture of *Sídliště* of the technocratic phase within the society that produced it, demonstrating how social relations, both at the family units, housing block units, city-peripheral units, governmental level, and international level, shaped architecture and how it shaped social relations back in return. Different poles of criticism to which large-scale housing estates were subjected during the 1970s and 1980s in Czechoslovakia can be perceived as part of the dissident movement with “velvet’ tactics” that culminated into the “velvet end” of socialism in Czechoslovakia in 1989, and therefore, can be placed within the context of the broader political and intellectual climate of their own time.

## Theories and Methodologies

My thesis seeks to test out a qualitative method in the study of the architecture of technocratic phase *Sídliště* created during the Normalisation-era in Czechoslovak big cities, and the lives of the residents who lived in them. It tries to approach and understand the topic of Czechoslovak *Sídliště* by using archaeological approach (or cross-sectional approach), as articulated by Michel Foucault, to historically contextualise and make sense of the phenomenon of *Sídliště* and its ideological and social implications in everyday life during the late socialist era in Czechoslovak big cities.<sup>8</sup> This method interpolates theoretical discourses from a variety of academic disciplines. Mainly, the thesis aims at combining existing theories within the fields of political history, cultural history, architectural history, social studies, economic history, psychology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, et cetera, and apply them onto the findings acquired from the primary sources and secondary sources, as to come to prove the hypotheses of this research. The goal is to reveal the potential of the synthesis of theories and concepts and to find ways in which they can be put into play in the analyses of the chosen sources and different phenomena existing within the framework of this research, as to come to a comprehensive understanding of “what happened” in the late socialist Czechoslovakia in the domain of mass housing.

“The 1970s,” the decade when the construction of the technocratic phase *Sídliště* peaked, is coincided with the time which Tony Judt perceives as “the most dispiriting decade of the twentieth century,” making it a time-period which is worth examining in its own right.<sup>9</sup> In terms of geographical framework, the housing estates built during the technocratic phase in Prague and Bratislava have been selected as the subjects of interest in this thesis not only due to their importance as the sites situated within the national capital cities which are the most influential cultural centres and the most thoroughly researched localities in the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, but also due to the fact that the phenomenon of *Sídliště* has been the strongest in these two cities than in other parts of the ex-Czechoslovak countries.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972).

<sup>9</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 477.

<sup>10</sup> Flekačová, “Beautiful Boxes or Technocratic Grey?,” 168.

Political thought has long been concerned with how best to locate the source of power in society. Scholar such as Anne Power argues that the construction of housing estates in post-war Europe was a “top-down form of social engineering based on physical form.”<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, on the other hand, preferred to see any kind of social engineering as “diffused” and “panoptical” in its nature, with everyone “being invested by its effects of power” which exercises over each of them regardless of social stratification through discourses.<sup>12</sup> According to the conception of power postulated by Foucault, rather than being centred on the state, power is diffused across tiny sites throughout society. The state, therefore, should be viewed as a practice rather than a concept to be examined. In order to comprehend the nature of power existed within a specific geographical area and time-period (the Czechoslovak Normalisation-era according to the framework of this thesis), a broader analysis is needed.

While socialist housing estates embody the culture and the social dynamics of the residents, their built environment can also communicate with them in subconscious manners, buttressing ideological implications that are hidden behind their forms and facades. Foucault regarded architecture as “not only an element in space, but (...) [it] is especially thought of as a plunge into a field of social relations in which it brings certain effects.”<sup>13</sup> This view is also principally articulated in the architectural theories of surveillance which focuses on understanding the physical and spatial nature of surveillance which involves the centralised mechanisms of direct and indirect watching over subjects through urban planning and architecture of housing.<sup>14</sup> This way of dissecting architectural space has been largely influenced by works of Jeremy Bentham, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Lacan, and is echoed by Slavoj Žižek with their common view that ideology in its most powerful form is hidden from the view of the person who submits to it. As Žižek puts it: “When we think we escape it, (...) at that point we are within ideology.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Anne Power, “High-Rise Estates in Europe: Is Rescue Possible?,” *Journal of European Social Policy* 9: 2 (1999). DOI: 10.1177/095892879900900204.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline And Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 217.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, James D. Faubion (ed.), *Power: Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002), 362.

<sup>14</sup> Maša Galič, Tjerk Timan, “Bentham, Deleuze and Beyond: An Overview of Surveillance Theories from the Panopticon to Participation,” *Philosophy & Technology* 30: 1 (March 2017), 9-37. DOI: 10.1007/s13347-016-0219-1.

<sup>15</sup> Sophie Fiennes, James Wilson, Martin Rosenbaum, Katie Holly, Slavoj Žižek, and Magnus Fiennes, *The pervert's guide to ideology* (British Film Institute: Zeitgeist Films, 2014).

Henri Lefebvre posited in “The Production of Space” (1991) that the real and successful “social existence” of any kind of society could only be made possible by the revolutionary transformation of space through art, architecture, and urban planning. Without the production of its own space in this way, its social existence would simply be stuck in the realm of ideological abstraction unable to be transmitted into the realm of culture.<sup>16</sup> In direct connection with this notion of “space” is the urban theory with the main theorists, Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, and David Harvey, who utilised the term “space” as an important lens for the understanding of the structures of power and the transmission of ideology in everyday life.<sup>17</sup> According to their common premises, people can internalise political ideologies through spaces and everyday acts within them in ways that are barely perceptible nor perceivable. This “spatial turn” in geography and architectural studies were the response to the underlying European-wide cultural, political, technological, and economic transformations that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s. This turn allowed theorists to move beyond the traditional image of the architectural practice which was viewed as being “overshadowed by its dark other: ‘the market’ or ‘the state’.”<sup>18</sup>

As Foucault himself saw his work, “Discipline and Punish” as “a historical background to various studies of the power of Normalisation.”<sup>19</sup>, this thesis applies his concept of disciplinary power in the studies of Czechoslovak “Normalisation” and existing ideologies that stood behind the architecture of technocratic phase *Sídlišťes* and the social practices that accompanied it. The thesis tries to understand the way space is involved in the reproduction of specific practices which in turn reinforce particular discourses specific to the context of the time. This approach is set along the same lines as that of the Critical theory of the Frankfurt School principally articulated within the works of scholars such as Herbert Marcuse, Teodora W. Adorno, and Max Horkheimer who studied contemporary society in dialectical ways.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space* (Oxford, OX, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 53-54.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.; Also see Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996); Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern geographies: the reassertion of space in critical social theory* (London: Verso, 2010); David Harvey, “Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80: 3 (September 1990), 418-434. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2563621>.

<sup>18</sup> Lukasz Stanek, “Architecture as Space, Again? Notes on the Spatial Turn,” *SpecialeZ* 4 (2012), 51.

<sup>19</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 308.

<sup>20</sup> See Herbert Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991); Theodor W. Adorno, and J.M. Bernstein, *The Culture Industry: Selected*



By trying to perceive the exercises of power from the objective viewpoint, this research asks the empirical question “What happened?” instead of “What went wrong?” or “What should be done?” (the questions which are usually postulated by the critical theorists), thus allowing for broader retrospective historical analyses. Moreover, in order to ask this same question “What happened?” from the perspective of the contemporary scholars and theorists during the late socialist time, this thesis searches for the critics of technocratic phase *Sídliště* who also posed the same question, but arrived at different and ways of conceptualising their views. Taken mostly from the “ontological dimension” of critical theory, this research will focus on the domain of ideological critique of modern society as to study how power tends to be obscured by ideologies that tend to present the reality not as it is. The critics of technocratic phase *Sídliště* also used the same way of conceptualising their attacks, as will be demonstrated.<sup>21</sup>

The primary sources used in this research are analysed and placed alongside one another while at the same time linked to the appropriated secondary sources as to form a big picture of the phenomenon of the technocratic phase *Sídliště* and the contemporary everyday life practices connected to it. The boundaries between primary, secondary, and tertiary sources used in this research are ambiguous, as the latter could also be analysed in the same way as how primary sources are analysed, so as to understand the implications behind the creation of these sources. For examples, the work by Karel Teige “the minimum dwelling” (1932) poses as the secondary source of its own time, explaining the situations and providing the historical remarks of the inter-war period.<sup>22</sup> The book also exists as the source to be scrutinised as primary source when looking retrospectively at the history and evolution of modernist ideas within the first Republic of Czechoslovakia. The main architectural journal of Czechoslovakia, *Architektura ČSR* (Czechoslovak Architecture) gives the overview of the contemporary architectural scenes, while at the same time works as the primary sources to be scrutinised.<sup>23</sup> While the academic researches done by Jiří Musil from the early 1960s till

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*Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 2001); Max Horkheimer, and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

<sup>21</sup> The ontological dimension of Critical theory (out of 6 dimensions) deals with the question of how reality is organised and developed. See Christian Fuchs, “Critical Theory,” *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication Theory and Philosophy* (2016). DOI: 10.1002/9781118766804.wbiect002.

<sup>22</sup> Karel Teige, Eric Dluhosch (trans.), *the minimum dwelling* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> *Architektura ČSR* (Praha: Klub Architektů, 1946-1989), Retrieved from: [www.digitalniknihovna.cz/mzk/periodical/uuid:b9ec7c90-a268-11e5-b5dc-005056827e51](http://www.digitalniknihovna.cz/mzk/periodical/uuid:b9ec7c90-a268-11e5-b5dc-005056827e51), Accessed 25 June 2019.

the end of state-socialism provide the readers with statistics and the ideas of social and economic conditions of the contemporary time, they could also be analysed as primary sources when trying to locate Musil's insights within the social critique of *Sídlíště*. Some of the primary sources are found within the secondary sources and are chosen for my own ways of analyses when appropriated.

The research also looks for artworks which play with the theme *Sídlíště* as to see how different contemporary artists used *Sídlíště* as a site to communicate their views on contemporary conditions. Not only that this research looks at paintings created by Czechoslovak artists including Fero Jablonovský, Vladimír Popovič, and Michael Rittstein during the late socialism, it also analyses contemporary films with *Sídlíště* theme including Táborsky's *Mud-covered City* (1963), Chytilová's *Panelstory* (1979), Lipský's *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth* (1983) and Menzel's *My Sweet Little Village* (1985), not with the purpose of showing how lives were really like inside the late socialist *Sídlíště*, but rather to demonstrate how the attack was grounded upon the sites of these estates within the contemporary critiques of socialism and modernity during the last two decades of state-socialism in Czechoslovakia. These films are analysed through the lens of critical theory as to match the common grounds found within the critical messages articulated in these films and the critical attacks on contemporary society as appeared within the works of the Frankfurt School theorists as well as Slavoj Žižek, the Slovenian philosopher who is specialised in the contemporary topics related to continental philosophy, political theory, cultural studies, psychoanalysis, film criticism, Marxism, and Hegelianism, whose works are cited when appropriated several times throughout the thesis.<sup>24</sup> The remarks by these theorists are incorporated into the thesis as to test out their claims within the context of topic under research, as well as to find a new way of looking at the history of Czechoslovakia during the late socialist time.

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<sup>24</sup> See for examples Fiennes, *The pervert's guide to ideology*.; Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989); Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006). Slavoj Žižek, *Did somebody say totalitarianism?* (London; New York: Verso, 2001).

## Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 sets out to provide the historical and ideological background and context of the housing estates in socialist Czechoslovakia for the analyses which follow in the next two chapters. It mainly works as a theoretical chapter and literature reviews with the aim of providing the readers with comprehensive conceptual and theoretical definitions and framework of this research.

Chapter 2 will bring together a variety of claims related to the discourse of architecture and urban style of Czechoslovak *Sídliště* from the inter-war period till the end of state-socialism in 1989. It looks at the history of Czechoslovak housing estates as well as the concepts that could be taken into the analyses of these estates and the ideological roots behind their creations. It will also zoom in to look specifically at Czechoslovak technocratic phase *Sídliště* in big cities, namely that of Prague and Bratislava, as to see the nature of these estates in the early phase of their existence during the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the impact they had on the lives of the residents during the late socialist time.

Chapter 3 is wholeheartedly devoted to the analyses of different poles of criticism which technocratic phase *Sídliště* was subjected during the late socialism up until 1989. It will try to place different types of critiques into categorical groups according to their tactics and ways of articulating their dissents within the contemporary context. The aim is to demonstrate the distinctive nature of each group of critiques and to show how despite not sharing a single method and ideology, they did share an essential engine for politics that culminated in the “velvet” end of the socialist system in Czechoslovakia in 1989. Another purpose is to test the claims as shown in chapter 2, and to come to the comprehensive view on the topic in the concluding section.



**Figure 1:** Prague's Jižní Město in the 1980s (Photographs by Jaromír Čejka)<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Antonín Dufek, Jiří Siostrzonek, Jindřich Štreit, *Jaromír Čejka - Jižní Město, fotografický projekt z pražského sídliště z počátku 80 let dvacátého století* (Praha: Positif, 2014), 156, 122.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **The Overview of Theories on Late Socialism and Mass-housing in Czechoslovakia**

This chapter will work as a theoretical chapter which focuses on providing the readers with conceptual and theoretical definitions and framework of this research. Literature reviews on academic theories and viewpoints are provided as the grounds for which the analyses in the next two chapters will lay on. The chapter is divided into six sections, each giving the preliminary background of this research by asking broad questions and answer them in ways which would provide the readers with the conceptual grasps while at the same time work as literature reviews that compare different existing academic findings.

#### **1.1 Spatio-political theories of space and practice: The dichotomies of the private and public spaces, and the “third space”**

In the past two decades, there has been a growing interest in “the everyday” in spatial disciplines such as geography and architecture, drawing mainly from Henri Lefebvre and Edward W. Soja. According to these scholars, everyday space, such as neighbourhood of houses or blocks of flats where people spend most of their time inside, is not simply a background or something neutral but it carries an intention by the ones who configure it and is interpreted by those who practice it, and therefore, in turn, produces and reflects ideologies within the society. Slavoj Žižek has explained in his lecture on Architecture and Aesthetics, the speech which simplistically articulates the very same idea:

"[Architects have] a great ethical-political responsibility which is grounded in the fact that much more is at stake in architecture than it may appear. (...) When you [architects] are building houses, you are also (...) materialising not only public ideologies, but you go often without knowing, (...) you write there in stones, even more not just public ideologies, but what public ideologies cannot say publicly, the obscene secret as it were. (...) To understand the ideology of the Soviet Union, it was not enough just to read official ideologies, [that are thought in university] You read official ideologies and then you step out of the door

and look at the houses, (...) and the houses tell you [about the existing ideologies]."<sup>26</sup>

Drawing from John Archer who posits that architecture has an ability to frame identity, Jane Rendell and her team argue that not only architectural design of houses informs the sense of self and identity within the community, it also poses as a model of social surveillance.<sup>27</sup> This notion of social surveillance was originally articulated by Michel Foucault in "Discipline and Punish" which explains the forms of formal and informal social control in everyday life.<sup>28</sup> Borrowing from Jeremy Bentham, the term "Panopticism" was coined by Foucault in 1975 as a metaphor for the process of social engineering as a result of power that no longer relies on overt repression but upon constant surveillance of a population and discipline of the "docile" body.<sup>29</sup> This kind of social engineering is embodied not only in the plan of prison architecture of Bentham's "Panopticon" (1791), but also extending beyond a discourse of the penal system in many other modern institutions such as asylums, hospitals, schools, and not excluding urban plans and the construction of modern housing estates in which the spatial nesting of hierarchised surveillance could be found.<sup>30</sup> At the middle of Bentham's model prison "Panopticon" stands a circular tower which is pieced by windows that allow a supervisor to look (without being seen) into the surrounding prison cells that form a circular structure that house them. The individual in each cell never knows whether he/she is being watched or not, and therefore assumes that he/she is. In this way, architecture "is no longer built simply to be seen" from the external space, but would also "operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters."<sup>31</sup> Within these spatial settings where a structure embodies watching power, individuals become "caught up in a power situation of which they themselves are made to be the bearers."<sup>32</sup> The major effect of the panopticon is to induce in the individual a feeling of permanent visibility that ensures the

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<sup>26</sup> Žižek Slavoj. "Slavoj Zizek on Architecture and Aesthetics," (Published by "Savician" on *YouTube*: 8 November 2011), URL: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdbiN3YcuEI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdbiN3YcuEI), Retrieved: 10 July 2019.

<sup>27</sup> John Archer, *Architecture and Suburbia: From English Villa to American Dream House, 1960-2000* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, and Iain Borden, *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> Foucault, *Discipline And Punish*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-172.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

automatic functioning of the silent discipline within a totalitarian regime. Power, in this way, has become more hidden as it exercises “spontaneously and without noise.”<sup>33</sup>

Many scholars have tried to apply this theory articulated by Foucault in an attempt to see whether “panopticism” can be used as a practical lens for the studies of power relationships that existed during the post-war era.<sup>34</sup> To sum up the common view of these scholars who specifically focus their researches on the post-war Soviet houses, the configuration of Soviet-styled housing estates (Khrushchyovki), rather than being a liberalisation of attitudes towards the domestic realm, they instead worked as a fine-tuned and well-developed system of total surveillance, in which power became centred less in the traditional organs of the state, but more on the behaviours of the citizens who were made to govern themselves through hierarchical observation which was made effortless inside the spatial settings in the form of large-scale housing estates. Unlike Lefebvre’s idea of home, which is inherently a “private space” that “asserts itself (...) always in a conflictual way, against the public one,” the home in the form of mass housing estates in the Soviet Union, arguably, broke down this oppositional relationship between the private sphere and the public sphere.<sup>35</sup> In her study of Czechoslovak post-1968 television programmes, Paulina Bren also demonstrates the same research approach, rejecting the “clear-cut public and private realms; a compliant public mask at work and a liberated self at home,” contending that we should never view the lives of ordinary citizens as being suppressed by all-pervasive

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 201, 206.

<sup>34</sup> Domestic space was a crucial site for ideological intervention. The realisation that living space could be intervened with the aim of achieving political goals became apparent in the Soviet Union during the Stalinist era as well as Khrushchev’s era with the intense house-building programme. For the studies of Soviet power in everyday life and the move away from the repressive style associated with Stalin’s rule to the intrusive style of rule during and after Khrushchev’s era, see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley: the University of California Press, 1999). For the studies that directly apply Foucault’s architectural theory of surveillance on the studies of Soviet power and its housing campaign after destalinisation, see Victor Buchli, “Khrushchev, Modernism, and the Fight against Petit-Bourgeois Consciousness in the Soviet Home,” *Journal of Design History* 10:2 (1997), 161-175; Christina Varga-Harris, *Stories of house and home: Soviet apartment life during the Khrushchev years* (London: Cornell University Press, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 361-362.

fear which made them withdraw into the private sphere.<sup>36</sup> After all, this private sphere seems to have been ingrained with ideologies that the citizens internalise in their everyday lives.

Drawing mainly from Edward W. Soja, while also elaborating within the similar set of dichotomies, that of the private and the public (or the Inside and the Outside as he terms them), Slavoj Žižek has a different approach of conceptualising these terms.<sup>37</sup> His application of “the parallax gap” in the evaluation of architectural “Inside” and “Outside” boundaries leads to a new outlook which negates the division of architecture only into these two dimensions. Žižek contends that:

“Inside and Outside never cover the entire space. There is always an excess of a third space which gets lost in the division into Outside and Inside. In human dwellings, there is an intermediate space which is disavowed. We all know it exists, but we do not really accept its existence. It remains ignored and unsayable.”<sup>38</sup>

Žižek talks of this mysterious gap in terms of the cables and pipes hidden in-between tiny spaces of walls and floors, and the sanitary sewer lines where we flush the excrement into. This third space is where all the messes and the scary unknowns locate, the space where Žižek calls the space that is intentionally created to be “out of sight”.<sup>39</sup> The dwellings, however, cannot function without the existence of this third gap. This gap, as argued by Žižek, provides the space where the class struggle can be staged. Linking this dialectical and symbolical analysis into the context of technocratic phase housing estates in Czechoslovakia, I see the third space as the place where the actual lives of the residents inside these estates actually played out underneath the rosy facade of official ideologies which, as Paulina Bren argues, have already firmly interposed both within the private sphere and the public sphere. Chapter 3 will look at the critiques against technocratic phase housing estates in

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<sup>36</sup> Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism After the 1968 Prague Spring* (London: Cornell University Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>37</sup> See Soja, *Thirdspace.*; Žižek, *The Parallax View*.

<sup>38</sup> Žižek, “Slavoj Zizek on Architecture and Aesthetics.”

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



Czechoslovakia through this lens of the “third space” which adds to the traditional dichotomies of the private and the public spaces inside the socialist system.

## 1.2 On the notions and natures of “socialist space” and “socialist everyday life” in post-war Czechoslovakia

The topic of socialist space (or city) has largely developed by R.A. French and F.E. Ian Hamilton and is recently echoed by Kimberly Elman Zarecor who looks at the spatial structure and urban policy inside cities where socialism existed as the main ideology, influencing the directions of political regimes that governed them.<sup>40</sup> Architects and planners of socialist city were part of the crews of “builders of socialism” who tried to construct under the ideological imperatives of socialism what David Crowley and Susan E. Reid call “a perfect order in real, existing space.”<sup>41</sup> In this socialist space, “the utopian versus the ordinary; art versus routine; ideals versus experience - were to be synthesized. (...) Every life contained an element of the extra-ordinary. Everyday life within the socialist space was not opposed to ideological life. On the contrary, it was a fundamental site of ideological intervention.”<sup>42</sup> Instead of relying on dissident writings and “civil society” rhetoric, historians such as Paulina Bren have examined the experiences of “ordinary people” in late socialist Czechoslovakia, the kind of experiences which, they argue, were different from the concerns articulated by the dissidents.<sup>43</sup> The Question arose is whether “socialist space” could also be evaluated with similar approach as to comprehend the nature of “socialist everyday life” in post-war Czechoslovakia.

Scholars of Chicago school of Urban Theory have long been discussed about the degree to which cities or nations with socialist system produce their own specific kind of space as distinct from capitalist space.<sup>44</sup> According to Zarecor, European socialist cities had

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<sup>40</sup> R.A. French and F.E. Ian Hamilton (eds.), *The Socialist city: spatial structure and urban policy* (Chichester; New York: Wiley, 1979); Kimberly Elman Zarecor, “What Was So Socialist about the Socialist City? Second World Urbanity in Europe,” *Journal of Urban History* (2017), DOI: 10.1177/0096144217710229.

<sup>41</sup> David Crowley and Susan E. Reid (eds.), *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2002), 11.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. Also see Victor Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism* (Oxford/New York: Berg, 1999); Buchli, “Khrushchev, Modernism and the Fight against Petit-bourgeois Consciousness in the Soviet Home”.

<sup>43</sup> Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV*.

<sup>44</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 54.

the same origin as that of the welfare state and capitalist cities in the nineteenth-century industrial city model that existed since the industrial revolution.<sup>45</sup> What later made them diverge on a different path from that of capitalist cities is, according to French and Hamilton, due to the authoritarian nature of the state control on the matters of investment, land ownership and land use, (sub)urban development, and even movements of populations, the issues which were determined in pace and form by the state.<sup>46</sup> Since the end of the Second World War, the frameworks for urban development in Czechoslovakia changed significantly from that existed during the First Republic, being characterised by the full state control of all investment and the disposition of land and urban space under socialism, with decision-making processes being centrally organised in a strictly hierarchical manner. Its urban and housing development programs reflected a wider political programme both domestically and internationally, drawing on progressive national traditions of the left-wing avant-garde and the Soviet direction after the country was brought into the Soviet sphere of influence.

Within the planned economic system, the five-year plans (starting from the 1950s) and the fifteen-year plans for mass housing construction (from the 1960s) were the priorities of state socialism.<sup>47</sup> Being reliant on financial grants, the position of urban planning was subordinated to that of central economic planning which could dictate the destinies of residential development projects and related technical infrastructure such as transportation systems. Housing, in the context of Czechoslovak post-war state-socialism, represented a significant political and social instrument of the state. The construction of apartments in particular locations could lure workers into specific industries, stimulating labour migration into the hubs of heavy industrial areas such as in Northern Bohemia and Moravia. New housing construction, when it occurred, was supposed to be seen (and was seen) by the citizens as the act of solicitude by the state, a visual dramatisation to the state's commitment to building the ideal Communist society which would be absent of class-based segregation and

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<sup>45</sup> Kimberly Elman Zarecor, "Infrastructural Thinking: Urban Housing in Former Czechoslovakia from the Stalin Era to EU Accession," in Edward Murphy, Najib B. Hourani, *The Housing Question: Tensions, Continuities, and Contingencies in the Modern City* (Routledge, 2016), 3.

<sup>46</sup> French and Hamilton, *The Socialist city*, 4.

<sup>47</sup> Melinda Benko & Komélia Kissfázekas (eds.), *Understanding Post-Socialist European Cities: Case Studies in Urban Planning and Design* (L'Harmattan Kiado, 2019), 114.

inequalities.<sup>48</sup> The key dimensions of practising housing architecture and building socialist city for the masses are intertwined.

After the Iron Curtain was drawn, just like how geo-political space was divided in the Cold War climate, Czechoslovak architecture faced the instant ideological comparison, with the line drawn between the architectural products of the First Republic seen as “democratic” architecture, while those produced after 1948 were labelled as “socialist” architecture. Not only that post-war Czechoslovak architectural production, by trying to surpass the others, was pitted in direct comparison with the contemporary architecture in the West, it also “had to be sufficiently different from the work of the domestic inter-war avant-garde in order to stand the trial of historical discontinuity.”<sup>49</sup> Different scholars focus on different themes that make socialist cities “visually” unique. Stephen Kotkin talks of a specific culture in which a socialist city is made, a kind of culture in which not only the Communist Party committees, their experiences, their institutions, and their programmes and practices were standardised, the visual and material of the city as well as its dwellings were also standardised.<sup>50</sup> Zarecor discusses the specific visual and material characters of socialist cities which are usually grey and made of concrete with rows of standardised concrete apartment blocks as the main feature.<sup>51</sup> Viewing it in this way, the notion of “socialist space” within post-war Czechoslovakia is synonymous to the intensive sub-urbanisation that peaked from the late 1960s. New towns were built mainly to provide liveable dwellings for workers needed in the expanded heavy industry and to proclaim the existence of a “socialist city” model.<sup>52</sup>

By the beginning of the 1960s, there had been an increasing popularity in the prefabricated and standardised elements which appeared in many proposed plans for the

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<sup>48</sup> Sampo Ruoppila, “Processes of residential differentiation in socialist cities.” *European Journal of Spatial Development* 9 (February 2004); D. M. Smith, “The socialist city,” in G. Andrusz, M. Harloe & I. Szelényi (eds.), *Cities After Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>49</sup> Ana Miljački, *The optimum imperative: Czech Architecture for the Socialist Lifestyle, 1938-1968* (London: Routledge, 2017), 111.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen Kotkin, “Mongol commonwealth? Exchange and governance across the post-mongol space,” *Ktitika* 8:3 (2007), 525.

<sup>51</sup> Zarecor, “Infrastructural Thinking”.

<sup>52</sup> Benko, *Understanding Post-Socialist European Cities*, 114.

construction of housing estates in Czechoslovakia.<sup>53</sup> This type of housing architecture had been pioneered in many areas in Central and Eastern Europe before it became widespread in Czechoslovakia, especially in those areas such as Dresden, Warsaw, and Stalingrad, where physical wartime damages were severe and the completely new construction of housing units were urgently needed in the late 1940s. Unlike in these severely damaged cities, post-war Czechoslovakia faced with severe housing shortages relatively late. Suffering only tiny wartime physical damage, the need to build new dwellings at such rate came later in Czechoslovakia after the relatively late realisation of the housing shortage problem from the end of the 1950s. Czechoslovakia experienced favourable housing situation during the first decade of the post-war era, with the transfer of the Germans out of the country from 1945 to 1948 which meant that many Czechoslovak residents in big cities could move to live in the border regions for which the Germans had been expelled, preventing Prague and Bratislava from experiencing immediate post-war population influx.

With regard to the demographic change in the whole country, there was no apparent population boom during the 1950s in Czechoslovakia, with the average number of children per woman going down from 2.8 in 1950 to 2.1 in 1960.<sup>54</sup> Prague itself, not being the industrial priority area according to the narrative of the “building of socialism” in the realm of heavy industrial production, the issue of housing shortage was left out of the urban plan during the first decade of the post-war era. Without the urgent need to provide the housing stock for its citizens immediately after the war and without any sign of baby boom that would have alarmed the state to prepare for the plan to build new housing units for its citizens before the crisis actually emerged, the eventual resolution in the late 1950s to tackle the problem that had been ignored appeared monumental. The grand project of the construction of 1,200,000 dwellings by 1970 was approved by the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC) in 1959, the task which, as commented by Musil in 1963, “would be feasible only if the construction was made as industrial in character as possible,” justifying the standardisation in housing form and engineering practice from the mid-1960s till the end of socialism.<sup>55</sup> Despite of the peak of housing construction with panel

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<sup>53</sup> Jiří Musil “The Sociological Approach in Planning Workers’ Housing: The Experience of Czechoslovakia,” *Ekistics* 15:90 (May 1963), 272. According to the statistics in his report, in 1956, the standardised elements constituted 71.8 per cent of all housing projects. It rose in 1958 to 81.8 per cent and in 1960 to 88.4 per cent.

<sup>54</sup> Tomáš Kostecký, Jana Vobecká, “Housing Affordability in Czech Regions and Demographic Behaviour – Does Housing Affordability Impact Fertility,” *Czech Sociological Review* 45: 6 (2009), 1197.

<sup>55</sup> Musil, “The Sociological Approach,” 272.

technology during the 1970s, Czechoslovakia entered the 1980s still with a housing shortage. The cut in the investment in new housing construction in the latter half of the 1980s further aggravated the housing situation.<sup>56</sup>

Similar with other countries in the Eastern Bloc, the housing production in Czechoslovakia was planned and organised mainly by the state and state-owned enterprises. About 90 per cent of all dwellings constructed used prefabricated large-panel construction technology as to capture the economies of scale. The system of waiting lists or the state system of allotment of new flats (pořadníky) was also put in place.<sup>57</sup> With this system, flats were expected to be allocated on the principle of merit and social need. This, however, created the ground for which corruption was widespread, with employees in socially prominent organisations and industrial companies, soldiers and families of high officials, and young households with children usually being on the top of the waiting list.<sup>58</sup> The rest of the housing stock was to be allocated under the Housing Act of 1964 according to the social criteria. High priority was put on the creation of family housing units while separate housing units for single adults had a low priority which led to single adults finding it hard to even get on the waiting list.<sup>59</sup> While it was possible to build a home privately, it was difficult to acquire labours and materials in legal ways. In Prague and Bratislava, while older inhabitants continued to live in the inner-city cores, most young working-class families with children moved to the newly built suburbs.<sup>60</sup> In Prague, for instance, the number of young working class constituted 75 per cent of the whole residents of the newly built estates by the end of the 1970s, and thus, forming a heterogeneous social structure and environment.<sup>61</sup> This system of waiting lists which gave priority to young families with children, therefore, created a dichotomy between the early (before the end of the 1960s), and middle/late-socialist housing estates (from the 1970s till the end of socialist era). Next question arose is if there is any specific relationship between the new circumstances with regards to housing in

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<sup>56</sup> Ihor Gawdiak (ed.), *Czechoslovakia: a country study* (Independent Publishing Platform, 1987), 84-85.

<sup>57</sup> M. Gentile and Ö. Sjöberg, "Housing allocation under socialism: The Soviet case revisited," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 29:2 (2013), 173-195.

<sup>58</sup> Martin Lux, Petr Sunega, "Public Housing in the Post-Socialist States of Central and Eastern Europe: Decline and an Open Future," *Housing Studies* 29:4 (2014), 501-519.

<sup>59</sup> Gawdiak, *Czechoslovakia, a country study*, 83.

<sup>60</sup> Ruoppila, "Processes of residential differentiation in socialist cities."; Musil, "City development in Central and Eastern Europe before 1990."

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

Czechoslovak socialist cities from the 1970s and the “Normalisation” period which timely coincided with it.

### **1.3 What is the nature of Czechoslovak “normalisation” era and how could it be linked to the notion of “socialist space” and “everyday life”?**

After the Prague Spring of August 1968, with the imposition of hard-line official control over political and social life which was cynically termed “normalisation”, significant repression was imposed against intellectual elites and control was increased over artistic works. The reformist leadership who promoted humanist socialism or “socialism with a human face,” Alexander Dubček, was replaced with Gustáv Husák who was a representative of the Communist Party's orthodox wing. “Normalisation” is the term originally dubbed by proponents of the regime to reflect the “political consolidation” or the coming back to socialist normality after the “political disruption” led by Prague Spring in 1968, but later widely used interchangeably with the term “late socialism” or “really existing socialism” to denote the last two decades (the 1970s and 1980s) of the Communist party rule in socialist Czechoslovakia. The period was principally characterised by the restore of the Communist party's full control over Czechoslovak society and the suppression of independent civic activities.<sup>62</sup>

In Irena Reifová's words, the Czechoslovak normalisation accompanied “the total dissipation of the political in the lives of ordinary people,” and at the same time, “the profusion of politics.”<sup>63</sup> According to Chantal Mouffe who distinguishes between the terms “political” and “politics”, the first means “the dimension of antagonism” which is constitutive of human societies, while the latter means “the set of practices and institutions through which order is created, (...) organizing human existence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political.”<sup>64</sup> The overall scene of the Normalisation time

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<sup>62</sup> This thesis will use the term “Normalisation” to describe the specific elements of “real socialism” within the post-1968 Czechoslovak everyday life, while the term “late socialism” will be used generally as a temporal term of the last two decades of state socialism.

<sup>63</sup> Irena Reifová, “A study in the history of meaning-making: Watching socialist television serials in the former Czechoslovakia,” *European Journal of Communication* 30:1 (2015), 84. DOI: 10.1177/0267323114565744.

<sup>64</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 9.

reflected how the ordinary citizens were generally disinterested in and withdrawn from most aspects of public and political life, while Communist ideologies became irrelevant and “melted in the air and kept surviving only in the rhetoric of the party officials.”<sup>65</sup> Only those within the circles of political opposition and the underground culture were “political” within the new social structure which the dissident philosopher Václav Benda termed as “parallel polis,” leaving “the doing of politics” to the party oligarch.<sup>66</sup> The return to domestic life or a retreat into the private sphere is the most well-known feature of Czechoslovak Normalisation.

This private sphere, however, could still be affected and dictated by the state policies. The domestic life of the ordinary people could be politicised and ideologised by specific state policies and their effects without the people being aware of it.<sup>67</sup> For instance, within the context of Normalisation, specific “pro-natalist” and “family-centric” policies such as interest-free loans, allowance equivalent of one-thirds of the average worker’s salary, birth grants, and bonuses provided to families with children, all provided substantial financial incentives for the ordinary citizens, driving them into living particular styles of life. One factor that encouraged marriages and reproductions was the endemic of housing shortage itself which made it difficult for single adults to get a home if not sharing with other people. Coincided with these conditions, panel apartment blocks within large-scale housing estates, in an unprecedented scale and quantity, began their construction process and the ordinary people were allocated to live in these estates while they were still under construction, with about 90,000 units being created per year from the mid-1970s.<sup>68</sup> The KSČ Congress in 1971 set the goal as part of the five-year plan to increase the standard of living of workers and to solve the housing problem by aiming at constructing at least 500,000 new flats around the country between 1971 and 1975.<sup>69</sup> The target was successfully achieved by 1974 and a new

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<sup>65</sup> Reifová, “A study in the history of meaning-making,” 84.

<sup>66</sup> Václav Benda (et al.), “Parallel Polis, or An Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe: An Inquiry,” *Social Research* 55:1/2 (1988), 211-246.

<sup>67</sup> This view is in lines with what Rosie Johnston also proposed. See Rosie Johnston, “Worlds of ordinariness: Oral histories of everyday life in communist Czechoslovakia,” *Human Affairs* 23:3 (July 2013), DOI: 10.2478/s13374-013-0137-1.

<sup>68</sup> See Tomas Frejka, “Fertility Trends and Policies: Czechoslovakia in the 1970s,” *Population and Development Review* 6:1 (March 1980), 65-93; Kateřina Lišková, *The Privatized Family: Atomized Hierarchy during Normalisation* (Czech Republic: Masarykova Univerzita v Brně, 2018), 179.

<sup>69</sup> “Byty, byty a opět byty,” *Československý architekt* 9:1 (1974), cited in Hana Cassi Pelikán, “Bydlení u Kosmonautů a v Centru Vesmíru,” *Každodennost panelového sídliště Jižní Město v Praze v proměnách času*, *Disertační práce: Univerzita Karlova v Praze* (Praha, 2014), 47-48.

more ambitious goal was set in the same year with the aim of building 2 million dwellings with bigger living space per capita (increasing from 12 m<sup>2</sup> to 16-18 m<sup>2</sup>) as part of the fifteen year plan of 1976-1990.<sup>70</sup> The year 1974 also saw the peak of birth rate, with about 300,000 children born, the highest rate in the history of the nation.<sup>71</sup> Although the pro-natalist policies benefited married couples with children, they still had to wait up to five years for their first separate flats.<sup>72</sup>

Coinciding with this, the panel construction in Czechoslovakia ended its qualitative peak and began its quantitative peak phase.<sup>73</sup> Husák's regime imposed legal constraints to prevent any uncontrolled association which could have been formed if non-standard types of housing construction outside prefabricated systems were allowed to be built.<sup>74</sup> The mass-housing architecture of the previous decade was denounced in the press for "uncritical" admiration of Western models in stressing aesthetics above socialist principles.<sup>75</sup> The Union of Czech Architects, formulated in the open years of 1968, was dissolved (as part of the regime's "consolidation" and "Normalisation" process) and replaced by the pro-regime Alliance of Czechoslovak Architects, leading to many competent architects losing their jobs while many choosing to emigrate in search for a less rigid working climate.<sup>76</sup> This set in a dark time for the architecture of new buildings in post-1968 Czechoslovakia. Martina Koukalová sees the 1970s as the decade when Czechoslovak people "began to witness the construction of the first genuinely large-scale housing estates."<sup>77</sup> This so-called "Technocratic phase" or "Real Socialist Phase" in the 1970s in big cities like Prague and Bratislava was characterised by a shift from low and mid-rise housing projects to the uniformity of the huge high-rise residential complexes built on blank green fields. They were different from those that existed before the decade in the way that these new residential complexes were intended to be independently functioning "cities" with full public services

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<sup>70</sup> "Výstavba bytů v ČSSR," *Československý architekt* 25-26:1 (1974), cited in Pelikán, "Bydlení u Kosmonautů a v Centru Vesmíru," 48.

<sup>71</sup> Frejka, "Fertility Trends and Policies," 65-93; Lišková, "The Privatized Family," 179.

<sup>72</sup> Gawdiak, *Czechoslovakia, a country study*, 118.

<sup>73</sup> The number of apartment dwelling units rose from 370,000 (from the end of the war till 1960) to 610,000 during the 1960s, and to 890,000 during the 1970s.

<sup>74</sup> Karel Maier, Michal Hexner, Karel Kibic, *Urban Development of Prague: History and Present Issues* (Prague: Vzdavatelství ČVUT, 1998), 60.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 41

<sup>76</sup> Koukalová, "Beautiful Boxes or Technocratic Grey?," 177.

<sup>77</sup> Martina F. Koukalová, "Panel Forms over time - Towards a Periodisation of Panel Housing Estates," in Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*, 213.



and sufficient working opportunities for all residents.<sup>78</sup> The most extensive housing construction took place in this period, with the most well-known cases being that of Jižní Město which began its construction period in 1971 and of Petržalka in Bratislava which began its construction time in 1973. Both of these estates will be discussed and analysed in Chapter 2.

Coinciding with this was a retreat from public engagement among the greater part of citizens which went hand in hand with the reported significant increase of living standards due to the massive investment that the state made in housing construction and the new systems and designs of flushed toilets, new types of windows, and a wide availability of household time-saving machines such as washing machines and electric stoves. Also directly relating to this retreat into the private sphere is the phenomenon of *chata mania* (the peak of the purchases of private cottages in the small villages for city-people's weekend getaways, with about one-thirds of Prague households owning this type of country houses in the early 1980s, the phenomenon which was specific to Czechoslovakia and not in other countries during the late socialism) which, according to Paulina Bren, was indirectly encouraged by the regime (by not implementing any measure to suppress it).<sup>79</sup> The implicit endorsement of the quiet and family-centric life seemed to seep into the ordinary people's practices of "real socialism." Bren relates this *chata-mania* phenomenon to what she calls the "Trauma of Normalisation" which made a large number of city-residents decide to "retreat" or "escape" into the quiet countryside.<sup>80</sup> The question of whether this "trauma" that drove city people into the countryside could be explained, not just by the "lack of independence permitted in politics" as Bren posits, but also to the peak of the construction of large-scale housing estates

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<sup>78</sup> Maier, *Urban Development of Prague*, 41.

<sup>79</sup> Paulina Bren, "Weekend Getaways: The Chata, the Tramp, and the Politics of the Private Life in the Post-1968 Czechoslovakia," in Crowley, *Socialist Spaces*, 124.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

in big cities and the rising percentage of people moving into such places is worth scrutinising.<sup>81</sup>

#### **1.4 How can we link the notion of “national road to socialism” to the socialist space in socialist Czechoslovakia?**

Mass housing estates, unquestionably, are built with a variety of styles across the world in the past century regardless of political or economic contexts. Questions arose are if housing estates in one country, or region, differ from those in the other places, and if so, what are the determinants that make them distinct from the others. According to the framework of this thesis, the questions that are relevant here are if there was “specificity” to the socialist space (socialist city) in post-war Czechoslovakia, and if it is possible (at all) to link this specificity to the notion of “national road to socialism” in post-war Czechoslovak context.

Michal Kopeček recently revisited the theme of “national road” to socialism in Czech Politics and political thought which originated in post-war Czechoslovakia from mid-1946 and became a “particular” important strategic orientation and regularly-used political and ideological tool of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.<sup>82</sup> This “national road” flourished from the surge of nationalist feelings that accompanied the transfer of about 3 million German population from the country by 1948. Since then, the revolutionary socialists in Czechoslovakia regularly used “the emotional reservoir of national identities for their own strategic purposes or conceptual claims.”<sup>83</sup> The grounds for “national road” rhetoric could

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<sup>81</sup> Bren relates this “trauma of Normalisation” to the “lack of independence permitted in politics”, see Bren, “Weekend Getaways”, 126. I am personally interested more in the “trauma” that could have developed from the impact of the new kind of living environment of the technocratic phase housing estates on the new residents, the sites where they decided to “escape from” during their weekends.

<sup>82</sup> Michal Kopeček “Czech Communist Intellectuals and the “National Road to Socialism””: Zdeněk Nejedlý and Karel Kosík, 1945-1968,” in Vladimir Tismaneanu, Bogdan C. Iacob (eds.), *Ideological Storms: Intellectuals, Dictators, and the Totalitarian Temptation* (2019).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

be traced back long into the “nationalistic history” of Czech and Slovak lands where the rich sources for Communist ideologues located.<sup>84</sup>

Crucially, in order to comprehend this specificity of the Czechoslovak national road to socialism, one needs to look at the history of the Bohemian and Slovak lands and their nation-building rhetoric and strategies, and the long traditions out of which the concept of Czechoslovak “national road to socialism” after the Second World War developed. The Czechoslovak nation came into existence as a small European state built up not by the aristocratic elites, but from below. Together with the strong democratic legacy, its cultural traditions were disconnected from elitism and sophistication, the aspect which had important consequences for the self-definition of Czechoslovak culture. Jaroslav Boček argued that this plebeian and egalitarian democratic characteristics of Czechoslovak masses led to a cult of mediocrity which was accompanied by the disrespect of rules and the susceptibility to disobey as well as disregarded the value of “purity” in artistic form and cultural production which was directly associated with aristocratic society.<sup>85</sup> This rejection of aristocratic elements, in turn, opened Czechoslovak culture to the contamination and hybridisation which could also be perceived in the architectural styles theorised and practiced by Czechoslovak citizens as will be articulated in this thesis.

In her analysis of Czech films produced during the normalisation period, Petra Hanáková discusses the notion of cultural “self-hybridisation” or “self-colonisation” specific to Czech and Slovak lands, the notion previously developed by Vladimír Macura who talked of this specific nature of Czech culture.<sup>86</sup> According to their view, many aspects of Czech-Slovak cultural production reflected “a strategy to deal with the political and cultural marginalisation and containment of the region.”<sup>87</sup> In direct connection to this, the “post-colonialist” perspective could be adopted to look at the cultural production inside Czech-Slovak lands as the product of “cultural colonisation”. Crucially, the cultural histories of the Czechs and Slovaks are characterised by the enduring struggles to form distinct national

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid. See also, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2nd ed.), (London, New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. Also see Jaroslav Boček, *Kapitoly o filmu* (Praha: Orbis, 1968) cited in Petra Hanáková, “The Films We are Ashamed of: Czech Crazy Comedy of the 1970s and 1980s,” in: Eva Näreipea, Andreas Trossek (eds.), “Via Transversa: Lost Cinema of the Former Eastern Bloc,” *Studies in Environmental Aesthetics and Semiotics* 7 (Tallin, 2008).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. See Vladimír Macura, *Znamení zrodu. České národní obrození jako kulturní typ* (Jinočany: H & H, 1995).

<sup>87</sup> Hanáková, “The Films We are Ashamed of,” 119-120.

cultures within the cultures of bigger empires at different time-periods. Historically, Czech and Slovak lands experienced a series of colonisations, beginning with the German colonisation in the seventeenth century, and within the Habsburg Empire during the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century (Austro-Hungarian Empire). Then, after a short break during the inter-war years, they then experienced the Nazi colonisation during the Second World War, before being included into the Soviet bloc after the Communist took control of power in 1948. Macura posited that the transposition of the cultures of others into Czech-Slovak lands reflected the Czech-Slovak “political” efforts to create the distinct culture of their own through cultural appropriation which, in turn, inadvertently created new hybrid forms that were to be perceived as authentic and distinct from that of other cultures.<sup>88</sup> Czechoslovakia, a small nation as a part of East-Central Europe, appeared to have developed a set of tactics, even long before its official creation, for benefiting from its inbetweenness regarding the two universalist centres, the west and the east, gradually appropriating the cultures of these two camps to form its own culture which was to be perceived as its own.

In many ways, this model of self-hybridisation and the notion of “inbetweenness” could be applied in the reflection of the “national road” within the architectural and urban planning of Czechoslovak mass-housing in the post-war era, the approach which this research will follow in Chapter 2 when looking specifically at the origins of the ideas behind the creation of mass housing estates in post-war Czechoslovakia, and in Chapter 3 which examines the “national road” rhetoric within the architectural critique of housing estates of the technocratic phase.

### **1.5 Who were the critics of technocratic phase housing estates? Can we view their critiques as a part of the dissident movement in socialist Czechoslovakia?**

Timewise, the onset of criticism against *Sídliště* in Czechoslovakia and crisis of socialism in the Eastern Bloc in the 1970s coincided with the crisis of the welfare state and the rise of neo-liberalism and post-modernism in Western Europe. Within the background

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<sup>88</sup> Macura, *Znamení zrodu.*, 74. Cited in Hanáková, “The Films We are Ashamed of,” 119-120.

of energy crisis and the threat posed by nuclear technology in the 1960s, the ecological and environmental questions were raised in the political arena European-wide.<sup>89</sup> It is evident that from the 1960s, the environmental consciousness helped undermine the faith in modernism and technology in Western Europe, with the widespread disillusion in the modernist architecture and its planning aspirations. Modernist architects came to be perceived as “technocrats” instead of “problem-solvers” which was the status they widely gained during the inter-war years. The phenomenological critique of modernism which became prominent from the early 1960s analysed the aesthetic elements and meanings behind modernist architecture, applying Martin Heidegger’s philosophy as well as contemporary theories by Kevin Lynch and Christian Norberg-Schulz to attack the strict geometry of modernist architecture, seeing it as devoid of meaning when being deprived of what they saw as fictional aspects, leaving it merely with pure objectivity of functionalism. The critique was particularly concerned with the objectivity of modernist architecture which expressed only the technical functions of a building, but without any inherent subjective meaning and meaningful story, the elements which are needed in the formation of the inhabitants’ authentic subjective existence. With strong tide against the aspirations of modernist architects and the climate of Cold War East-West division, the European-wide organisation “CIAM” (The International Congresses of Modern Architecture) was dissolved in the 1960s. Subsequently, the new construction of large-scale housing estates in modernist style went on a great decline in the west during the 1970s and the 1980s due to the opposition from the masses as well as within academic and intellectual sphere.

In sharp contrast, the magnitude of the construction of housing estates in Czechoslovakia (as well as in other East-Central European countries like Poland and Hungary) was at its peak in the 1970s, with the period of construction prevailed into the late 1980s. Unlike the situation in the West, with the welfare state model of city building and with the existence of free market in which people could buy and sell their homes according to the rule of supply and demand, there was almost no alternative housing offered in the Socialist Bloc. In the west, as the new post-baby boom generation grew up with increased incomes, those who were able to afford new flats could choose to move out from less attractive locations, leaving the post-war aged generation, low-income citizens, the

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<sup>89</sup> See Philip Sarre and Petr Jehlika, “Environmental Movements in Space-Time: The Czech and Slovak Republics from Stalinism to Postsocialism,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32:3 (2007), 346-362.

unemployed, and ethnic minorities in badly-looked-after high-rise housing estates with modernist-functionalist design. The more people had the means to choose other places to live, the more the housing estates attracted those who had no other option left. The concentration of low-income strata inside these public housing estates in the west by the end of the 1960s negatively affected their image and influenced how people perceived the idea of functionalist housing estates in general. The negative connotation on public housing also came from the tenants who saw themselves as inferior when comparing themselves to those who lived in other more attractive types of available houses in the market.<sup>90</sup> Losing its status, gaining negative image, and not being attractive for buyers and even to the residents themselves, all these factors caused a sharp decline in the construction of new large-scale housing estates in the west by the beginning of the 1970s. The reasons for the fall of the high-rise modernist functionalist settlements in Western Europe, therefore, cannot be attributed solely to the modernist-functionalist architectural details and concepts. The availability of the alternative types of dwelling as well as the complex socio-economic factors also came into play which affected the perceptions the public had on modernist style large-scale high-rise housing complexes.

Unlike in Western European capitalist cities where housing estates were usually occupied by lower social status groups, the situation of post-war *Sídliště* in Czechoslovakia was different, being inhabited by all groups of residents, sharing similar characteristic with other housing estates in socialist cities within Central and Eastern Europe. The role of ethnic groups was almost negligible in the housing estates in big cities of Czechoslovakia. In comparison with other types of housing available in the post-war era, the position of *Sídliště* in big cities like Prague and Bratislava was relatively good, being occupied by residents with higher social categories (mostly the middle class) than those who lived in the inner-city areas and other provincial areas.<sup>91</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that owning a flat in these housing estates was considered a symbol of personal success for many.<sup>92</sup> The negative western-oriented stereotypes of the large-scale housing estate lifestyles contrast sharply with what

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<sup>90</sup> Pascal De Decker and Caroline Newton, "At the fall of Utopia," *Urbanistični inštitut Republike Slovenije* 20:2 (2009), 77.

<sup>91</sup> Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*, 254.

<sup>92</sup> H. Moravčíková, "Concentrated responses to the issue of pre-fabricated mass housing ensembles, Bratislava, 1950–1995," in H. Moravčíková, *Mass housing East–West: international conference proceedings* (Edinburgh; International, Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh, 2012).

happened in Czechoslovakia in the last two decades of socialism. The results of one study by Martin Veselý reveal that most of the residents who lived in the technocratic phase housing estate Jižní Město during socialist time were satisfied with their living environment.<sup>93</sup> The environment of Jižní Město produced literature, street art, and rap music which stress the advantages of the place rather than the disadvantages.<sup>94</sup> Veselý, however, explains this phenomenon not by negating the negatives of the lives inside Jižní Město or to say that the physical environment of Jižní Město was positive. He instead contends that, while the residents were satisfied with what were given to them inside Jižní Město, they had a hard time admitting that their own places were worse than elsewhere.<sup>95</sup> After all, in the case of post-war Czechoslovakia, housing estates everywhere else were perceived by the masses as also grey and monotonous, so many residents would ask back to the interviewer why they should “go somewhere else?”<sup>96</sup> In this regard, unlike in the Western bloc where free market existed, the lack of housing choices and housing shortage problem in Czechoslovakia seemed to help increase the sense of the residents’ satisfaction in one’s own flat inside the technocratic estates, a kind of paradox that derived from the shortcomings within the socialist planning itself.

With the residents of these estates being reported to be content with their living environment, the critiques of *Sídliště* did not come from them, but rather from those within the academic, intellectual, and artistic spheres. Experts in different fields including sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, architects, film directors, and intellectuals, without mutual institutional organisations to cohesively push forward their claims against the negatives of *Sídliště*, worked separately with different means and tactics, but within the similar climate of “normalisation,” to criticise in their own ways the shortcomings of this type of housing environment. This characteristic of the critiques of *Sídliště* as unsystematic and without any mutually coordinated aim (as will be demonstrated in Chapter 3) but with the mutual grievance against state policies that brought *Sídliště* into existence, makes these

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<sup>93</sup> Martin Veselý, “My Estate Is My Home - The Factors and Methods for Identification of Housing Estate Residents with Their Surroundings in the Example of Prague's Jižní Město,” in Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*, 246.

<sup>94</sup> See for example “Pojd’te bydlet na Jižní Město - na Jižák” (Come live in JM) cited in Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*, 244.

<sup>95</sup> Martin Veselý, “My Estate Is My Home,” in Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*, 246.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

critiques compatible with the notion of “dissidence” as articulated by Ines Weizman.<sup>97</sup> Weizman suggests that dissidence is “a spectrum of possibilities for action that provided certain opportunities to think and act differently, in opposition to a regime.”<sup>98</sup> According to her insight, dissidence, unlike activism which always has a clear objective and results-oriented, usually “accept potential complicities, in order to allow for a basic continuity of life and thought, while at the same time being reflective and alert about these complicities. (...) It lacks perhaps the overt gestures of attack in favour of strategies of subversion and resistance of a political regime.”<sup>99</sup> In Chapter 3, I will try to look for these characteristics within the critiques of *Sídliště* as to see if they can be viewed as part of the Czechoslovak dissident movement that culminated into the “velvet” end of state-socialism in 1989.

## **1.6 How can we explain the nature and manners of the criticism of technocratic phase *Sídliště* in Czechoslovakia?**

Critical Theory refers to a whole range of theories which take a critical view of society. It is generally a critique of the totality of modernity and its developments, noting how different features of modernity can lead to problems for individuals and society. For the Frankfurt school of Critical Theory, its version of critical theory incorporates an analysis of individuals and their social psychology with a special attention on culture, art and aesthetics, the areas which had not previously been seriously incorporated into traditional Marxian analysis which primarily concerns with economic and political issues. This type of critical theory aims to give social agents a critical purchase on what is normally taken for granted and to dispel the illusion of ideology as to enable people to understand and overcome the power structure that oppresses them, by giving a critical and self-critical awareness of how phenomena can be understood differently when stripping them of the ideological facades.

With regard to the critique of modernity, according to Douglas Kellner who was one of the main theorists of the Frankfurt School, the modern culture produced by enlightenment

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<sup>97</sup> Ines Weizman, “Dissidence Through Architecture,” *National Gallery of Art* (2013), Retrieved from: [leidiniu.archfondas.lt/en/alf-04/interviews/weizman](http://leidiniu.archfondas.lt/en/alf-04/interviews/weizman), Accessed: 20 July 2019; Ines Weizman, “Mobilizing Dissent. The possible architecture of the governed,” in Greig Crysler, Stephen Cairns, and Hilde Heynen (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory* (Sage Publications Ltd, 2012), 107-120.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.



and different forms of instrumental rationality such as science, technology, efficiency, quantification, mathematics, and et cetera, promote conformity and are part of the core of the “totally administered society” which leads to “the end of the individual.”<sup>100</sup> Within this modern society, “objective truth” becomes identified with these forms of instrumental rationality, while the concept of “pure reason” developed by Kant is applied more and more by the ruling class to create more rational forms of prisons, to justify nationalistic and fundamentalist claims, or by those in the economic sphere to solve the issues related to the efficient organisation of production to maximise profits.<sup>101</sup> By ignoring these products of modern culture or by not critically trying to understand the hidden conditions of the modern society, Theodor W. Adorno, another main theorist of the Frankfurt School, claimed that this would lead to a general anxiety which would then be paired with imaginary causes, or a condition whereby the paranoid fears are projected onto imaginary enemies, leading directly to the situation termed as “ticket thinking” whereby the cult of authoritarian personality easily takes an advantage of an entire political agenda by idealising its own leadership and projecting hostile images onto invented enemies.<sup>102</sup> According to these scholars, any form of totalitarianism existed in the modern society is opposed, not excluding the totalising form of centrally administered socialism in the Eastern Bloc.

Crucially, the Frankfurt School theory and its critical stance against the products of modernity appears to have deeply penetrated the realm of architecture. Modernist-functional architecture, as one direct product of modernity, is strongly criticised. Adorno pointed to the paradox of functionalism, with his direct attack on the post-war architectural functionalism and its apparent aiming for the “universal architectural objectivism.”<sup>103</sup> Foucault directly wrote about “panopticism” which directly connects architecture to the hidden functions of modern society.<sup>104</sup> Within the feminist branch of the Frankfurt School Theory, the notion of patriarchy is linked to architecture, showing how patriarchy ideologically affects all of us daily in a hidden nature.<sup>105</sup> Scholars who study the topic of

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<sup>100</sup> Stephen Eric Bronner, Douglas MacKay Kellner, *Critical theory and society: a reader* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>101</sup> See for example, Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant's Critique of pure reason* (Copenhagen: Cosmopolitan, 2018).

<sup>102</sup> Bronner, *Critical theory and society*, 117.

<sup>103</sup> Neil Leach, “Functionalism today,” in Neil Leach, *Rethinking architecture: a reader in cultural theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), 6-19.

<sup>104</sup> Foucault, *Discipline And Punish*.

<sup>105</sup> See for example, Rendell, *Gender Space Architecture*.

“patriarchal architecture” claim that, while architecture of housing and public buildings became a space where decisions were made between men, the private space and the interior settings of dwellings are left as the only space where women are free to voice their agency.<sup>106</sup> Women in this kind of patriarchal society are “modulated by criteria, determined by men, that limit their agency,” argued Jasmina Cibic, with similar stance foregrounded by Simone de Beauvoir since the 1960s in France.<sup>107</sup> Each unit of dwellings, particularly that within modernist-functional buildings, for Cibic, exists as a kind of “imposed box” created by men, in other words, a cage for women designed by men.<sup>108</sup> To what extent these attacks were directed against the construction of technocratic phase housing estates during the late socialist time by Czechoslovak people? Did the contemporary critical theorists in Western Europe have something to say about such phenomenon?

Interestingly, however, the attack on socialist system in the Soviet Bloc by the contemporary Frankfurt School theorists could not be done outwardly due to the climate of the Cold War era, and their special position within the solidarity with Western liberal democracy. As Žižek puts in, the topic of post-war Communist regime was for these theorists “a traumatic topic (...) of which they had to remain silent” as to maintain “their official mask of radical leftist critique” of capitalism in the West. Openly siding with the critiques of socialism would have deprived them of “their radical aura, changing them into another breed of Cold War anti-Communist leftist liberals.”<sup>109</sup> I see my thesis as an attempt to analyse the phenomenon of technocratic phase *Sídliště* in Czechoslovakia through the lens of what Žižek terms “anti-Communist leftist liberals” who did not exist with such label during the socialist time. Instead, they existed as a subsection within the all-encompassing group called “the dissidents.”

According to Kellner, a totalitarian system always attempts to establish and acquire great power by penetrating “every area of life from self-constitution to interpersonal relations” and thus always results in the destruction of “individuality and particularity.”<sup>110</sup> With their Western Background, the critical theorists of Frankfurt school based their

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<sup>106</sup> Jasmina Cibic, “Patriarchal Architectures,” (7 January 2019), Retrieved from: [fondation-phi.org/blog/2019/01/07/patriarchal-architectures/](http://fondation-phi.org/blog/2019/01/07/patriarchal-architectures/), Accessed 2 July 2019).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. Also see Simone de Beauvoir, *Simone de Beauvoir: feminist writings* (Chicago: Urbana, 2015).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Žižek, *Did somebody say totalitarianism?*, 93.

<sup>110</sup> Bronner, *Critical theory and society*, 54.

critiques on capitalist system which dominated the western sphere of European and the United States in the post-war era. They were against the ways in which capitalism created certain conditions that outwardly appear to be natural and positive. By taking off the rosy façade, the system seems to have distorted essential human nature and blocked the potentials for revolutionary changes which would have come from each individual's awareness of his/her freedom to transcend beyond the circumstances that are given. The increased sameness and uniformity and "rationalised objectivism" within the totalitarian society, however, have successfully prevented any real freedom from occurring, with the existing mechanisms of "repressive tolerance" that ensure that even oppositions, usually existing in the form of social critique, is tolerated and then turned into a repressive force which extinguishes the very possibility of true rebellion to be formed. Within this bleak reality, one of the main spokesmen of Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse, by taking from Walter Benjamin's insight suggested in 1977 that only in "the artistic realm" which had not been absorbed into the totalitarian paradigm would provide the only hope for a future emancipation. Question arose is whether the nature of the Czechoslovak dissent (with regard to the housing issues related to *Sídliště*) in the 1980s possesses the elements that went in lines with what Marcuse proposed for. To what extent and in which nature those within the artistic realm, including architects, film directors, and writers succeeded in voicing their critical claims? In Chapter 3, I will search for the contributions of critical theory of Frankfurt School within the narratives of Czechoslovak critiques of *Sídliště* in the last two decades of state-socialism, the area which was not touched by the contemporary Frankfurt School theorists who only concentrated their criticisms on the shortcomings of the products of modernity appeared within the capitalist system.

With regard to the concept of critique, two different types of critique of modernity that are generally discussed are the "social critique" and the "artistic critique."<sup>111</sup> Social critique, originally inspired by traditional Marxist theory on class struggles, denounces any source of exploitation (particularly capitalist exploitation, economically and physically), social inequalities, and is mainly associated with the economic struggle of the working-class against the bourgeoisie. Artistic critique, on the other hand, is the critical side of artistic activities which are originated in the intellectual and artistic circles. While the source of their discontent is the same as that of the social critique (the totalitarian nature of capitalist

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<sup>111</sup> Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello, and Gregory Elliott, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2018).

exploitation and oppression), their means of criticising it is different as they use arts in different forms to denounce the modernist effects of disenchantment and inauthenticity, the loss of the sense of what is beautiful and valuable, the effects which are derived mainly from conformity and standardisation.<sup>112</sup> Another way of looking at these critiques is to divide them into two types with regard to their intents, the “reformist” and the “revolutionary”, the first intends to correct and improve the system rather than overthrowing it, while the latter envisages the total collapse of the old system which would then be replaced by another systematic type. Within the context of Czechoslovak state-socialism its dissidents, question arose is how we can, if possible at all, place the critiques of *Sídlišťe* into these categorical boxes.

Nonetheless, following Foucault’s idea of disciplinary power which proposes the specific way of looking at power as complex, diffused, and paradoxical in its nature, one should, therefore, escape the dilemma of seeing the critiques as “either for or against.” As Foucault himself argued, “working with a government doesn’t imply either a subjection or a blanket acceptance. One can work and be intransigent at the same time. I would even say that the two things go together.”<sup>113</sup> Michel Feher calls this “the politics of the governed” whose protesting actions incorporate a variety of tactics, from direct confrontation, active political participation, self-conscious inefficiency, tactical refusal, and evasion.<sup>114</sup> Barbara Falk talks of the effectiveness of dissidence which fought against the hegemonic forms of domination in socialist society via “propaganda by action.”<sup>115</sup> Existing between conformity and resistance, dissident intellectuals and artists worked under the conditions that their confrontational resistance produced less impact than their subversive, implicit messages through their behaviours and their works. In the words of Ines Weizman, instead of presenting itself explicitly, “dissidence haunts. (...) if they or their strategies are revealed, the acts and those behind them often wither away.”<sup>116</sup> Taking into account Žižek’s notion of “Parallax Gap,” but also in the same lines as that of Ines Weizman, dissidence disappears into the mysterious third space hidden behind the walls, existing as the hidden core that runs the whole dwellings without being seen. Last but not least, Žižek’s remark adds to the

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Michel Foucault, James D. Faubion (ed.), *Power: Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002), 457.

<sup>114</sup> Michel Feher, *Nongovernmental Politics* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

<sup>115</sup> Barbara J. Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003), 272.

<sup>116</sup> Ines Weizman, *Architecture and the Paradox of Dissidence* (London: Routledge, 2014).

understanding of the nature of dissidence in an interesting way, saying how the visual aspect of architecture alone is in itself already “a spontaneous critique of the ruling ideology”:

“This brings us back to Stalinism. What fascinates me [in Stalinist architecture] is the architecture at its best oppressive, hierarchical, static, self-enclosed architectural [forms]. To put it simplistically, the fundamental paradox of Stalinist architecture [is that] we have a society, Stalinist Communism, which officially presents itself as egalitarian justice, working-class empowering, and so on and so on. Then you look at the buildings and what you see immediately there is some oppressive quasi-medieval hierarchic image. Architecture tells the truth. What was not allowed to state publicly was materialized in stones there. That is for me what is so interesting in architecture [which] is often a spontaneous critique of the ruling ideology.”<sup>117</sup>

I devote the whole Chapter 3 for the analyses of these elements within the critiques of *Sídliště* during the late 1970s and the 1980s. Their dissenting tactics will be examined in order to come the comprehensive understanding of the nature of their struggles within the socio-political climate of the late socialist Czechoslovakia.



**Figure 2:** Prague’s Jižní Město in the 1980s (Photograph by Jaromír Čejka)<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Slavoj Žižek, Alan Saunders, “Parallax and Architecture, with Alan Saunders,” (Posted on YouTube by Ippolit Belinski, 1 November 2016). Retrieved from: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bprgBMckSw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7bprgBMckSw), Accessed on 13 July 2019.

<sup>118</sup> Dufek, *Jaromír Čejka - Jižní Město*, 108-109.



**Figure 3:** Bratislava's Petržalka in the 1970s-80s<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> "5/27-Petržalka 70,80-tých rokov," in *Bratislava a jej Premeny* (Published 9 May 2017), Retrieved from: [www.facebook.com/BratislavaajejPremeny/photos/a.1835797510077684/1835802103410558/?type=3&theater](https://www.facebook.com/BratislavaajejPremeny/photos/a.1835797510077684/1835802103410558/?type=3&theater); [www.facebook.com/BratislavaajejPremeny/photos/a.1835797510077684/1835803203410448/?type=3&theater](https://www.facebook.com/BratislavaajejPremeny/photos/a.1835797510077684/1835803203410448/?type=3&theater), Accessed 25 July 2019.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Czechoslovak *Sídliště* within the wider Historical Context**

By the end of the Communist era, one-third of the Czechoslovak citizens lived in the prefabricated housing estates.<sup>120</sup> With the time of the construction of these estates varying within the span of fifty years, they could be chronologically classified into groups taking into account their developmental trajectories, namely architectural styles and engineering practices. Their ideological and stylistic origins, however, went beyond their existences, dating back to the early twentieth century European-wide modernist-functionalist movement to solve the housing shortage which was part of the crisis of modernity. Post-war era in European big cities saw significant similarities among them, regardless of geographical divides, in terms of suburban development in the form of large-scale housing estates, which shared the same modernist-functionalist origins popular since the early inter-war years.<sup>121</sup> One can draw some similarities between the post-Stalinist repudiation of historical and decorative elements in the architecture of Socialist Realist era, and Le Corbusier's desire to replace the “outmoded” decorative and historical styles with functional architecture to fit the new machine age of the early twentieth century. In this regards, one can say that the works of planners and architects, regardless of their political views or nationalities, transcend the ideological and geographical boundaries. Nevertheless, although architectural styles and forms of these large-scale housing estates are often superficially similar, the intentions of the creators and the receptions by the masses differ hugely across the regions, with each country having distinct past experiences, and therefore distinct problems, strengths, and political configurations. As Eli Rubin argues in his study of post-war housing estates in East Germany (Amnesiopolis), the building of mass-produced housing estates by socialist regimes in different socialist countries should not be seen as “undifferentiated space” or “transnational” which produce same effects, but should rather be

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<sup>120</sup> Jana Temelová, Jakub Novák, Martin Ouředníček, and Petra Puldová, “Housing Estates in the Czech Republic after Socialism: Various Trajectories and Inner Differentiation,” *Urban Studies* 48:9, 1811–1834. DOI: 10.1177/0042098010379279.

<sup>121</sup> Richard Turkington, *High-rise Housing in Europe: Current Trends and Future Prospects* (Delft: Delft University Press, 2004).

seen within the national narrative.<sup>122</sup> Taking the same stance, by trying not to neglect the transnational perspective in this research, I will also zoom-in to look at specific local contexts in order to see if the mass-produced housing in Czechoslovakia had its own uniqueness.

This chapter will try to situate Czechoslovak *Sídliště* within the wider historical context. The chapter is divided into four parts. The first part will ask the question of whether the *Sídliště* of the technocratic phase was a manifestation of modernist and socialist ideologies advocated by the influential architects and planners in inter-war and post-war Czechoslovakia. The main aim is to find explanations of how modernism and socialism in Czechoslovakia, as the intertwining ideological roots of the architecture of *Sídliště* of the technocratic phase, took the form that can be perceived as distinct from that existed in other countries. The notion of “Self-hybridisation” in Czechoslovak architecture will be applied as a framework of this section. It also tries to search for traces of historical continuities of Czechoslovak culture in the realm of housing architecture from the inter-war years to the end of the socialist era. The second part will try to locate the *Sídliště* of the technocratic phase within the historical context of post-war Czechoslovakia so as to come to a comprehensive understanding of *Sídliště* that were built during the 1970s and 1980s within the broader temporal context of post-war political, architectural, and urban history of Czechoslovakia. The third part will look specifically at the technocratic phase *Sídliště* in Czechoslovak big cities, namely Prague and Bratislava, which will be analysed through the spatio-temporal lens in the last section. It will also tackle and ask some questions related to the issue of psychological impact that these estates potentially had on the residents.

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<sup>122</sup> Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 9.



## **2.1 Czechoslovak architectural “self-hybridisation”?: The ideological roots of *Sídliště***

### **2.1.1 “Functionalism” as an architectural and stylistic reaction to the early 20th century European-wide housing crisis**

In many ways, mass housing development has been one of the most ambitious, and at the same time, most problematic projects of modernism. The housing shortage itself was a part of the crisis of modernity which accompanied the coming of the second phase of industrialization which caused a rapid growth of population in industrial centres from the beginning of the twentieth century. The housing crisis in Europe, which had started at the turn of the century, become catastrophic during the inter-war years, producing a hopeless images of homelessness and misery, and of inadequate living conditions that spread even to those strata of society that had previously remained unaffected. According to the estimation done by Eric Dluhosch, about two-thirds of the European population lived in overcrowded apartments during the inter-war years.<sup>123</sup> Modernist architects and planners saw the solution to this most immediate problem in the industrialisation of architectural construction and design as part of the process of industrial rationalisation. Largely, the form and design of housing estates in the socialist bloc countries during the post-war era were influenced by an aesthetic and engineering paradigm borrowed from the modernist-functionalist tradition originated within this inter-war avant-garde circle that enthusiastically searched for practical solutions to the European-wide housing crisis, the direct product of modernity.

The reason for the parallel in architectural styles and principles of prefabricated housing estates can be drawn from their shared ideological roots within the CIAM movement (1928-1959), a European-wide organization which aimed at spreading the principles of modernism within the domains of architecture. What explains the success of the CIAM during the inter-war period was its ability to induce social change at transnational levels, the aspect which the League of Nations could not integrate in its organisation. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), and the CIAM movement created a big impact on the ideas of future accommodations, with the emanation of American Ford's Model T as a new aesthetic for modern architecture within the realm of housing. The modernist architects within the

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<sup>123</sup> Teige, *the minimum dwelling*.

CIAM declared that houses should be created as “une machine à habiter,” or machines for living in, and should be built in the similar ways as cars were built in the Fordist mode of production, with the same utilitarian and standardised looks as that of the Model T.<sup>124</sup> The CIAM came up with these new architectural concepts with a revolutionary fervour, believing that the new mass-produced architecture would change the world for the better. For them, the dwelling should reflect the conditions of the modern era, being “in harmony with the state of modern conscience, to which a hundred years of sensational developments have brought us.”<sup>125</sup>

Though not a pure expression of Le Corbusier’s ideas, the architectural developments of apartment buildings in many places around the world incorporated in their designs some of his modernist principles, with the desire to radically replace the traditional cities with new ones organized on a completely different spatial principle. Despite of the differences in historical trajectories, the model of large-scale housing estates in the socialist bloc countries, as well as in Czechoslovakia, shared similar roots with the western model of post-war large-scale housing estates, dating back to inter-war capitalist experiments with architectural industrialization. Remarkably, the Czechoslovak avant-garde architects from the inter-war time was the most active in Central and Eastern Europe, raising the question of the particularity of Czechoslovakia and its long road of “High-modernism” leading up to the technocratic phase of the construction of the housing estates in the 1970s.

### **2.1.2 Post-colonial perspective on “Czechoslovak” high modernism: The inter-war “self-hybrid” origin of post-war functionalist housing estates**

For the First Czechoslovak Republic, as a new state founded in 1918 breaking up from the Austro-Hungarian rule and under the expectation that it would succeed in living up to the demands of modernity and democracy, the imperative of modernisation was its *raison d’être*. For the modernist architects from within East-Central Europe, the modernist idea was very attractive not only due to the international prestige of the CIAM, but also due to its potential in effectively tackling the pronounced issue of housing shortage in the region in a

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<sup>124</sup> David Gartman, *From Autos to Architecture: Fordism and Architectural Aesthetics in the Twentieth Century* (New York; NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2013), 6.

<sup>125</sup> Le Corbusier, *Aircraft* (London: Studio Ltd, 1935), 5.

holistic way. Unlike in the Soviet Union, architectural industrialisation in Czechoslovakia dated back to the inter-war experimental building plan created within by working for the Czechoslovak shoe company “Baťa” in Zlín, which, far from adopting modernist developments elsewhere, was ahead in Europe in panel building technologies. As one of the most well-known native Czechoslovak modernists, Karel Teige followed the vision of other European avant-garde intellectuals within the CIAM and integrated the new Czechoslovak state into the international community in the realm of architecture. This Czechoslovak “High modernism”, however, entailed specific features which demonstrate an effort to adapt the universal modernist ideology to form its own kind of modernism, and make some changes to suit the rhetoric of state building of the new democratic Republic.

In Czechoslovak modernist architecture, the act of nationalising foreignness in order to form the “imagined community” of its own can be recognised.<sup>126</sup> This form of “self-hybridisation” in architectural design of modern buildings could be read as an amalgamation of values from other places as to construct a form that is self-contained and non-derivative which would then act as a strategy to deal with the perceived isolation or constraints as a newly formed small nation. Architectural historians such as Jean-Louis Cohen suggests that the kind of new radical modernist architecture in inter-war Czechoslovakia was embraced as a native modernist ideology also due to its potential as a tool to convey the sense of national prosperity and integrity.<sup>127</sup> The stress on the notions of self-realisation of the style that was unique and the idea of autonomy and individualism within architectural design largely reflect the political rhetoric of the newly built state.

Adolf Loos (1870-1933), a Czechoslovak architect and theorist, could be seen as one of the pioneers of modernism within Czech lands though his reputation was hidden behind the spotlight of that of Le Corbusier and Karel Teige. The product of his ideas of ideal architecture of the modern time foreshadowed much of what Teige later articulated during the inter-war years. Loos was strongly against all types of ornament and the decorative architecture which he directly associated with the “lower culture” which he associated with the notion of primitiveness, savageness, criminality, the barbarous races, and eroticism, all

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<sup>126</sup> Anderson, *Imagined community*.

<sup>127</sup> Mentioned in E. Merrill, “High Modernism in Theory and Practice: Karel Teige and Tomáš Baťa,” *Slavic Review* 76:2 (Summer 2017), 449.

of which, he claimed, display an inability to distinguish between “the unnecessary” and “the necessary, or “the usefulness” and “the uselessness.”<sup>128</sup> As the student of Loos, the main view of Karel Teige (1900-1951) on modernity took much from Loos’s, but also adding some elements of his own time.<sup>129</sup> Teige contended that modernism and national renewal could be formed primarily from the daily realities of modern life, not by the romanticised and fanciful reconstructions of traditions and historicism of a long-gone golden age associated with the Hapsburg Empire.<sup>130</sup> To him, functionalism was the most effective means to help escape from the prison of nostalgia and historical memory in the realm of architecture. Mechanisation and modernisation were enthusiastically embraced as a tool that helped create a new state that would be an antithesis to elitism associated with the old regime. Nevertheless, Jessica Merrill argues that it was actually the old regime’s paternalistic traditions and Moravian quasi-feudal master-apprentice relationship that provided the ground for the realisation of a Czechoslovak modernist city, particularly that built by Bat’a in Zlín in the inter-war period.<sup>131</sup> This fact was, however, de-emphasised within the ideologues of “high-modernism” in order to support the “break with the past” rhetoric of the newly built democratic state.

As the reader of Karl Marx, Teige adopted Marxist sociology into his “high-modernist” architectural designs, arguing for the mass production of prefabricated housing estates which would create a uniform and equal lifestyle for the residents. Teige referred to the collective dwellings as found in the Soviet Union in the early twentieth century where every “cell” was strictly standardised and formed “the most mature form of the minimum dwelling.”<sup>132</sup> The democratic state-building rhetoric of the First Republic, however, would not align with the Communist all-out notion of collectivism which was translated in the realm of mass-housing into a kind of communal apartment (Kommunalki) where a couple of families shared one communal apartment.<sup>133</sup> This explains the kind of “hybrid” of thoughts of Teige that combined the idea of collective housing from the Soviet sources of inspiration together with the classical liberal-democratic notion of individualism and the

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<sup>128</sup> Jimena Canales, and Andrew Herscher, “Criminal Skins: Tattoos and Modern Architecture in the Work of Adolf Loos.” *Architectural History* (University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2005), 235-256.

<sup>129</sup> Teige was active during the inter-war years.

<sup>130</sup> Teige, *the minimum dwelling*, XV.

<sup>131</sup> Merrill, “High Modernism in Theory and Practice.”

<sup>132</sup> Teige, *the minimum dwelling*, 351.

<sup>133</sup> See for example Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994).

importance of personal privacy. Instead of agreeing with the idea of communal apartment found within the Soviet Union, Teige called for the building of a kind of beehive housing that would be different in a way that it would provide each family unit with private space within the collective industrial environment, and thereby “securing the autonomy of the individual worker within the collective.”<sup>134</sup>

The toning down of the architectural influence of “the others” was also perceived within the repudiation of the western High modernist aesthetic. In 1924, Teige together with his associates came up with the statement that the “new” Czechoslovak architecture “must not follow any aesthetic idea. A perfect, economic and modular construction suits the mentality of modern man just as the perfect machine does.”<sup>135</sup> While the latter part statement shows similar outlook to that of Le Corbusier's “une machine à habiter” (Teige first met Le Corbusier in Paris in 1922), the first one clearly demonstrates the early ideological deviation in architectural design of Czechoslovak leading architect from that of the West. This notion that architecture should be ridden of aesthetic concerns was more and more pronounced in Czechoslovakia as time passed as Teige gained greater reputation within the national architectural sphere. George Baird sees this direction of Teige as a “shift of tone” from humanist modernism toward a new deviation with a radical materialist and utilitarian conception of architecture.<sup>136</sup> Teige insisted that only from the strictest functionality and the perfection of its utility that architecture could express its beauty.<sup>137</sup> By 1932, when his monograph “the minimum dwelling” was published, Teige clearly prioritised instrumental social functions to creative expression, attacking Le Corbusier's and Mies' works as “modern snobbery” for their lack of functional purity and the too much emphasis on modernist aesthetic.<sup>138</sup>

Due to the influence of Teige and his outlook that differed from the Western circle of the CIAM and the influence of the state-building rhetoric which Teige embraced, Czechoslovakia together with other East-Central European countries strove to form their

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<sup>134</sup> Teige, *the minimum dwelling*, 346; Merrill, “High Modernism in Theory and Practice.”

<sup>135</sup> Quoted in Vladimir Šlapeta, *Czech Functionalism* (London: Architectural Association, 1987), 163.

<sup>136</sup> George Baird, “Architecture and Politics: A Polemical Dispute,” *Oppositions* 4 (1974), 80. Also see George Baird, *The Space of Appearance* (Cambridge, 1995), 133 and 70; Kenneth Frampton, “The Humanist v. The Utilitarian Ideal,” *Architectural Design* 38:3 (1968): 133-36; Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (3rd ed.) (London, 1992), 160.

<sup>137</sup> Translated and Quoted in Peter A. Zusi, “The Style of the Present: Karel Teige on Constructivism and Poetism,” *Representations* 88:1 (2004), 114.

<sup>138</sup> Teige, *the minimum dwelling*, 6.

own circle within the CIAM which became known as the CIAM-Ost, with official meetings held in early 1937 in Budapest and in the Spring of the same year in Zlín and Brno. Based on the principles proposed by architects within the CIAM-Ost, the future dwellings in East-Central Europe were expected to differ from the CIAM designs in the West. The “minimum dwelling”, according to CIAM-Ost architects, would match the trajectory in the region and would serve as an effective solution to the region's specific kind of housing crisis and limited economic means.<sup>139</sup> This demonstrates the evidence of the deviation in outlooks of modernist architects within the CIAM and the CIAM-Ost which predated the Second World War and the coming into power of the Communist regime later on. This diversion and the way in which proposals were made and how problems were framed by the CIAM-Ost went beyond the 1930s and reappeared later in full strength in the 1970s, though obscured by the disruption of the Second World War, the establishment of state socialism from the late 1940s, and the short-lived popularity of socialist realist style in the 1950s.<sup>140</sup> Many former inter-war avant-garde groups later assumed leading positions in the architecture department of the post-war Czechoslovak *Stavoprojekt* (The main union/organisation for Czechoslovak architects), continuing the tradition of inter-war domestic kind of modernist-functionalism. The strong modernist-functionalist tradition resurfaced after the end of the short-lived socialist realist era (This will be explained in the next section), with the High Modernist principles regarding the mode of construction and the subordination of aesthetic elements to the practical functional aims survived into the 1970s, influencing the design and the construction of panel housing estates during the Technocratic phase. Despite of the change in political outlooks, the influence of CIAM and CIAM-Ost was, in many respects, felt in the long term by means of a trickle-down effect of their ideas which transcend the temporal, ideological and geographical boundaries. The prominent position of the Czechoslovak inter-war avant-garde and its proposal for ideal socialist society guaranteed that its stance was taken seriously when the Communist regime took power in 1948. The post-war goal of reconstruction was seen as an extension of the inter-war dreams of the avant-garde who ultimately were handed with real tasks of executing their projects in such a scale that would actually make societal change. These young members of the avant-garde were involved in

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<sup>139</sup> Martin Kohlrausch, *Brokers of Modernity: East Central Europe and the Rise of Modernist Architects, 1910-1950* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019), 116.

<sup>140</sup> Modernist architects in Europe also declared themselves willing to collaborate with Nazism at the end of the 1930s, showing how the modernist project was compatible with any authoritarian regime at any point in the recent time.

the actual realization of their functionalist ideals and the transfer of architectural ideas into real life for the sake of building a socialist city.

### **2.1.3 The construction of post-war socialist society with modernist principles: The intertwining of socialism and modernism**

“Socialism” and “modernism” are usually positioned as opposing one another, with the latter mostly assigned to the capitalist bloc due to the popularity of the Cold War’s binary model. Only recently that scholars have taken seriously the notion of “socialist modernism”, linking socialist ideology directly with modernist cultural products.<sup>141</sup> The previous section has elaborated how prefabricated mass housing can be perceived not just as the hallmark of state-socialism, but also as a part of a transnational phenomenon, with interweaving connections with modernist trajectories, particularly “Modernism” as a transnational style of architecture and urban planning which evolved European-wide during the inter-war years. The discourse of Modernist-functionalism existed within the rhetoric of the left-wing avant-garde since the inter-war years, prior to the coming into power of Czechoslovak Communist regime. The most eloquent theorist of Czechoslovak functionalist architecture, Karel Teige, proposed in 1936 his vision of an ideal form of functionalist architecture within the ideal socialist society:

“Functionalism could and has to be overcome, because its own powers and its own progressive development will take it further, toward its more mature form and even its own antithesis. However, the progress made by functionalism won’t be negated by the subsequent rich development of socialist architecture. The great and famous step toward the new socialist architecture that was accomplished by functionalism, compels the avant-garde architects to continue to advance toward the goal, which is to

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<sup>141</sup> See for examples Susan E. Reid, “Communist Comfort: Socialist Modernism and the Making of Cosy Homes in the Khrushchev Era,” *Gender & History* 21.3 (2009), 465-498; Susan E. Reid and David Crowley (eds.), *Style and Socialism: Modernity and Material Culture in Post-war Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 2000); Paul Betts and Katherine Pence (eds.), *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007); Susan E. Reid, “Khrushchev Modern: Agency and Modernization in the Soviet Home,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47 (2006), 227-268.

produce a plan for a free Communist life, a framework for the free development of individuals and a collectivity.”<sup>142</sup>

After the Communist came into power in Czechoslovakia, the utopian dreams of the left-wing modernist-functionalists seemed closer to reality than ever before. The dream became particularly materialised after Khrushchev’s Speech in 1954 addressing the issues related to the industrialised buildings and the call for a special attention on the “content” of architecture rather than the showing-off of Socialist glorious through building facades. The “admiration of form” and the “building for the sake of facades” were both repudiated by Khrushchev:

“What is Constructivism? (...) the Constructivists in fact moved in the direction of aesthetic admiration of form divorced from content ... A consequence of this was that anti-artistic, depressing ‘box style’ that is typical of modern bourgeois architecture (...) Certain architects who argue for the need to fight Constructivism are guilty of the opposite: they decorate the facades of buildings with superfluous and sometimes utterly unnecessary decorative elements that require expenditure of state resources. (...) Such architects could perhaps be called ‘inside-out Constructivists’ in as much as they themselves are on the slippery path to ‘aesthetic admiration of form divorced from content’.

(...) what comrade Zakharov [the architect who proposed to build a high-rise apartment buildings in Moscow with sculptures on the windowsills at the corners of the buildings] is most concerned about: he needs beautiful silhouettes, but what people need is apartments. They don’t have time to gaze admiringly at silhouettes; they need houses to live in! (Applause). (...) A five-wall room with an angled window is inconvenient for living in, not to mention the fact that the residents of this room must spend their entire lives staring at the back of a sculpture. Of course, it’s not particularly pleasant to live in a room like this. It’s good, then, that these houses were never built and that comrade Zakharov was restrained from his art.

And all this is called architectural and artistic decoration of buildings! No, comrades, this is architectural perversion that leads to the spoiling of materials and to unnecessary expenditure of resources. Moscow’s

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<sup>142</sup> Karel Teige, *Development of Socialist Architecture* (1936), quoted in Miljački, *The optimum imperative*, 21



organisations have taken the right decision in dismissing comrade Zakharov from his post as head of an architectural studio. But for the good of all of us this should have been done much earlier.”<sup>143</sup>

The architecture of apartment blocks from the coming into power of Nikita Khrushchev, therefore, was no longer built to be seen and enjoyed from the outside, or to express itself to the onlookers. According to Khrushchev’s rhetoric, it was the lives of people inside those apartment blocks that should be under main concerns. This kind of outlook went in lines with how Foucault viewed the new purpose of the architecture of the modern time which “is no longer built simply to be seen,” but would “operate” to “act on those it shelters.”<sup>144</sup> As a reaction to Khrushchev’s statement and his repudiation of Stalinism at the twentieth Party Congress in 1956, a post-war Czechoslovak architect and historian Karel Honzík commented in reaction to Khrushchev’s statements with regard to the vision of new housing architecture:

“During capitalism our speculations on the development of dwelling and lifestyle were only utopian dreams. Within the Socialist regime, (...) our dreams have a realistic basis.”<sup>145</sup>

Honzík’s statement reflects how the Czechoslovak architectural circle reaffirmed the Soviet new direction in architectural production which reflected the concerns for the ordinary life of the masses “inside” the functionalist housing. The main purpose of housing architecture was to provide a habitable dwelling with no need of unnecessary aesthetic character which was perceived as having no benefit to the lives within those space (people behind the back of sculptured window). In terms of scale and vision of the new kind of socialist city, Honzík believed that the state had the responsibility as well as the ability to develop “architecture of entire cities in a way that has never been known to history.”<sup>146</sup> This new nature of entire cities being planned as a single entity was claimed by him in 1956 as something that had to be “fought for” and to strive to make it become “A habit” and “a part

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<sup>143</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, “Industrialised Building Speech,” *the National Conference of Builders, Architects, Workers in the Construction Materials and Manufacture of Construction and Roads Machinery Industries, and Employees of Design and Research and Development Organisations* (7 December 1954), Retrieved from: [volumeproject.org/industrialised-building-speech-1954/](http://volumeproject.org/industrialised-building-speech-1954/) (uploaded 1 March 2009), Accessed 2 July 2019.

<sup>144</sup> Foucault, *Discipline And Punish*, 172.

<sup>145</sup> Karel Honzík, “What the XX Congress of CSSS means for Architects,” (1956), cited in Miljački, *The optimum imperative*, 83, 115.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

of the bloodstream,” showing how the technocratic phase *Sídliště* was not merely a natural or inevitable outcome of the shortcomings within the socialist system and the economic limits that symbolised the 1970s, but rather a product of well-developed rhetoric and ideology.<sup>147</sup>

In 1958, at the Brussels Expo (the Brussels World’s Fair) where Czechoslovak pavilion won the first prize (the best pavilion of the Expo) from the international competition of national pavilions, Honzík praised the modernist architectural work of the pavilion as worthy of the success due to its uniqueness and its “unity of the outside and the inside” with “a synthesis where all parts of the environment and landscape participate, and also in the construction’s technical details.”<sup>148</sup> For Honzík, the prize that Czechoslovakia as a country received was reported as “definitely an indication of the direction for everyday architecture, industrial, and applied arts that together produce the human living environment.”<sup>149</sup> Ana Miljacki argues that, after the winning prize was received from the Brussels Expo in 1958, “for the first time”, there existed the concrete architectural model for Czechoslovak architects to follow.<sup>150</sup> Due to the success of the project and the popularity it gained among visitors and judges, Miljacki argues as followed:

“the subsequent theorisation of the pavilion—perhaps more than the building itself—literally helped to crystallize what the project was and what architecture could do for Socialism. (...) The general recognition of the alignment of the rhetoric, the method, and the aesthetic product that had ultimately fashioned the success of the pavilion in Brussels, at least as it was understood from within the Czech architectural and cultural context, “confirmed” that architecture had to be conceived as a complex and synthetic environment [connecting the Outside and the Inside] in order to properly engage and represent Socialist lifestyle.”<sup>151</sup>

From 1958 onwards, Honzík continued to demonstrate the connections between the goals of socialism and ways that architecture could help in achieving those goals. He tried to show his followers and the public how a “singular well-designed tectonic and technical

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 80-81.

<sup>148</sup> Karel Honzík, *Cestou k socialistické architektuře* (1960), 318, cited in Miljački, *The optimum imperative*.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

works coalesce into a higher organic whole” produced “a much stronger impression” of the notion of collectivism which was one of the main pillars of socialist ideology.<sup>152</sup> Honzík’s firm vision on the architectural future of socialist Czechoslovakia coincided with the implementation of the plan for the construction of 1,200,000 homes for Czechoslovak people which was approved in 1959 (Figure 4). Being on the right side of the official state-socialist narrative, Honzík’s modernist-functionalist ideas were well received in the architectural circle of the nation as well as among state apparatchiks. The harmonious mixture of functionalism and socialism in state’s discourse constantly reappeared at greatest strength from the beginning of the 1960s onward, as can be seen below in the statements made in 1961 and 1973 respectively:

“The new feature at this stage is quantity, the mass-scale, which eventually results in achieving new quality. Characteristic of the new socialist architecture is the effort to control this quantity and to endow it with new quality. The new tasks incumbent upon architecture and originating in the requirements of the society cannot be solved outside the scope of industrialization, for industrialization alone can fulfil the requirements of mass-construction. Not individualism, but social responsibility is a force and a feature of new architecture.”<sup>153</sup>

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“The goal of the regime is the creation of a socialist housing, one fitting for socialist mankind. It is to be an un-ostentatious dwelling, a standard one but individually variable in its standardisation. It is to be a habitable dwelling, a tool for living and not simply an architectonic composition of merely aesthetic character.”<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>153</sup> Karel Storch, *New Techniques and Architecture in Czechoslovakia* (Praha: The Union of Architects of Czechoslovakia, 1961), 7, cited in Alice Lovejoy, “A world eternally under construction”: Věra Chytilová and late-socialist Prague,” *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 9:3, 251-252. DOI: 10.1080/2040350X.2018.1469201.

<sup>154</sup> Dušan Šindelář, “Bzdlení v socialism,” in: J. Kubička, Karla Rzvolová, Dušan Šindelář, *Bzdlení '73: Studie posluchačů VŠUP v Prave k problematice socialistického obztného prostředí, I. etapa* (Praha, 1973), quoted in Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*, 223.



**Figure 4:** Official posters published in 1960 to promote the new plan of creating 1,200,000 dwellings by 1970<sup>155</sup>

According to these texts, the “new quality” of housing architecture would be achieved through the reduction of social disparities, the notion that the Communist party of post-war Czechoslovakia translated into its policy of “mass housing for the working people” or “the Socialist Man” of Czechoslovakia. Architecture was perceived as having the function of a social condensator that would lead people away from the pre-existing bourgeois living patterns to a socialist way of living. There was no longer a place for “vulgar” Socialist realism obsessed with aesthetic character. In practising architecture for all with no flat being better or worse than the others, industrialisation and standardisation were significant factors for creating an egalitarian society. The housing design and the design of the socialist man and his way of living were a two-directional project, with the first produced the latter, and the latter would then also require specific types of housing design with maximum standardisation to suit the new egalitarian lifestyle. When the country began its Normalisation period, the principles and rhetoric behind the building of technocratic phase

<sup>155</sup> “Proudová metoda urychlíme výstavbu bytů,” Retrieved from: [www.idnes.cz/kultura/vytvarne-umeni/bydliste-panelove-sidliste-vystava-umeleckoprumyslove-muzeum.A180125\\_152337\\_vytvarne-umeni\\_vha](http://www.idnes.cz/kultura/vytvarne-umeni/bydliste-panelove-sidliste-vystava-umeleckoprumyslove-muzeum.A180125_152337_vytvarne-umeni_vha), Accessed 21 July 2019.

*Sídliště* appeared to explicitly combine the “High Modernist” ideas in housing architecture with the tenets of socialism. This strongly affirmative avant-garde with an experimental fervour was more apparent than ever before within the top-down logic of architectural discourse and practice during the Normalisation period. The implementation of extensive housing construction policy and ideological and experimental fervour seemed to go hand in hand, culminating in the 1970s’ housing construction peak and the beginning of the (later) much condemned technocratic phase *Sídliště*.

As demonstrated, a part of intellectuals within the Czechoslovak socialist regime attempted to connect the modernist vision of the “scientific-technical revolution” in the realm of housing architecture with expected reforms of the state-socialism. Not just borrowing from the modernist discourses originated within the democratic First Republic of Czechoslovakia, the socialist planners also added elements specific to socialism that would suit the contemporary national-political context, the trend which had been apparent since the inter-war period with the deviation of CIAM-Ost from the mainstream CIAM. Though using different rhetorical languages, the contents of these messages produced by the socialist intelligentsia, in many ways, incorporate much of the languages of Le corbusier (mass-produced industrial house as a tool for living) and of Tiege (modernist architecture stripped off aesthetic elements) which were widely used during the “High Modernist” inter-war years when Czechoslovakia belonged to advanced European capitalist industrial regions.

With high optimism of the first two decades after the end of the Second World War which was stimulated by the general excitement about science, technology and engineering, and the positive ideas of futuristic world that would accompany the space age, there was, however, no precise image of what the future world should be like. The wish for a radical break from the past among general population and all the state politicians and planners meant that many avant-garde architects and theorists could find some common grounds with socialist ideologues. While the resurrection of avant-garde rhetoric and practice in the 1960s and the early 1970s in Czechoslovak architectural field formed a link between architectural generations (those from the inter-war years and in the post-war years) in Czechoslovak context, Ana Miljacki suggests that this also “served as an allegorical expression of the nostalgia for revolutionary purposefulness—for the lack of idealism amidst production

quotas and regimes of standardisation.”<sup>156</sup> Revolutionary messages from post-war architects in favour of avant-garde functionalism in the 1960s went hand in hand with the “Humanistic” or the “Beautiful phase” of Czechoslovak housing construction, with many experimental architectural plans being presented with optimistic fervour. The vagueness of the key ideas within the modernist-functionalist theory, as a result of the evolution of its idea as solely a theory without a real test, meant that they were greatly opened to interpretation and manipulation at any point in time. During the high-time of socialist normalisation-era which was coupled with the housing shortage problem, these modernist-functionalist ideas, were then being filled with contents specific to the building of socialist man and quiet lifestyle rhetoric. The political-economic circumstances of the time made possible the full-blown realisation of modernist-functionalist ideas and the transformation of theory into real practice in the realm of mass-housing architecture. This, however, did not guarantee the ideal outcomes as anticipated in the prophetic theoretical work by the members of the avant-garde and in the rhetoric of the ideologues of Czechoslovak state-socialism.

## **2.2 The periodisation of post-war housing estates in Czechoslovakia**

During the post-war renewal and restructuring phase between 1945 and the Communist takeover in 1948, the housing construction of housing estates were still in its “Archaic Phase”, with the construction of the first “true” housing estate in Prague “Solidarita” in the suburb of Strašnice as the realisation of the pre-war wish of the left-wing architects to create socialist housing for all. Zarecor sees this phase as a “critical bridge” that connected the architectural vocabulary of the inter-war avant-garde with the new post-war Communist framework.<sup>157</sup> After the communist coup in 1948, the “Construction Nationalisation Act” from the same year merged all private construction firms into the state

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<sup>156</sup> Miljački, *The optimum imperative*, 231.

<sup>157</sup> Kimberly Elman Zarecor, “Czechoslovakia’s model housing developments: modern architecture for the socialist future,” in Vladimir Kuli, Timothy Parker, and Monica Penick, *Sanctioning Modernism: Architecture and the Making of Postwar Identities* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015).

enterprise “Czechoslovak Construction Works” which employed more than 1,200 employees constituted as one of the world's largest single design organisations at the time.<sup>158</sup>

With this organisation, up to the mid-1950s, mega-plan was put forward to build larger residential complexes in “Socialist-Realist” style which represented itself in the form of anachronistic use of historic styles with ornamentation and a human scale. Socialist Realist architecture in Czechoslovakia was associated with the years 1949–1956 and a dialectical synthesis of industrialisation, communist ideology, and national traditional architectural forms. However, the question of architectural aesthetics in housing returned for only a short period and the desire to put this project into reality was half-hearted and limited to a small group of critics against unreformed functionalism. An architect Jiří Kroha, for example, talked of the artistic and humanist aspects of architecture with “national and classic forms” combined with “revolutionary socialist content.”<sup>159</sup> This socialist-realist phase in Czechoslovakia was represented almost entirely by the construction of *Nová Ostrava* (1951–1958), also the country's “first socialist city” which drew its inspiration from imperial Russian and Czech Renaissance traditions and combined them with the architectural industrialisation.<sup>160</sup> Also relevant to this phase are the never-realized designs for the housing estates of *Červený vrch* and *Petřiny* which had similar Socialist-Realist elements. The lack of enthusiasm in creating architecture of socialist realism in Czechoslovakia is reflected in the way contemporary Czech architects nicknamed Socialist-Realism “Sorela”, a name of a shoe polish brand of the inter-war era, and thereby mocking the superficial nature of ornamental facades that covered the building structures. Sorela was short-lived in Czechoslovakia due to the preference of Czechoslovak architects on the specific form of modernism that should rather take on “the national form”, instead of copying or borrowing from the Soviet Socialist-Realist style. Also, unlike in the Soviet Union during the same period, the housing complexes in Prague that were realised during the Socialist-Realist phase were still in direct connection to the earlier urban fabric and the already existing infrastructures of Prague centre.<sup>161</sup> What differs the housing estates in the phase to the earlier

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<sup>158</sup> Flekačová, “Beautiful Boxes or Technocratic Grey?,” 174.

<sup>159</sup> Krivý, “Postmodernism or Socialist Realism?,” 76.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Flekačová, “Beautiful Boxes or Technocratic Grey?,” 175.

one is the more extensive use of standardised design and prefabricated elements which then later took-off from the late 1950s.

The next phase is coined as the “Pioneering phase” which lasted from the mid-1950s till the early 1960s. A non-architectural factor significantly shaped the development and the homogeneous form of housing estates built during this phase, with the process of “de-stalinisation” as officially promulgated by Khrushchev's speeches which outwardly negated Stalinist architecture associated with ornamentalism and historicism. However, with most Czechoslovak architects being not so enthusiastic in ornamentalism in the first place, this post-stalinisation in socialist Czechoslovakia was associated more with centralised and industrialised methods of building construction, with the full-scale implementation of the system of prefabricated panel technologies and the search for new paths in construction engineering. Because of the technical and structural obsolescence of the old engineering system, a new system of fully assembled concrete-panel buildings was put in place. During this phase, the height levels still did not exceed five floors due to the unavailability of lifts, but its extent of uniformity was unprecedented. However, despite all of the efforts at increasing built production, the housing shortage deepened as time passed as the state, prior to 1959, gave priority to industrial manufacturing (with the growth rate of 170 percent between 1948 and 1957) and not to the construction of new flats for a growing number of post-war population. For this reason, the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC) set down as its goal in 1959 the resolution of the housing problem through construction of 1,200,000 dwellings by 1970, the task which, according to Musil, the prominent urbanist and sociologist who assisted the urban planning at the time, “would be feasible only if the construction was made as industrial in character as possible.”<sup>162</sup> Fueled by the spirit of official optimistic propaganda, there appeared an increasing number of proposed plans of housing estates that adopted mainly prefabricated and standardised elements into their projects for higher speed of the quantity-driven housing “assembly line.”<sup>163</sup>

Before the 1960s, there was no apparent desire from the top within socialist Czechoslovakia for a more liberated society or the so-called “thaw” in politics, a phenomenon which has been associated directly with the time after the official

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<sup>162</sup> Jiri Musil, “The Sociological Approach,” 272.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, In 1956 it was 71.8 per cent; it rose in 1958 to 81.8 per cent and in 1960 to 88.4 per cent.



denouncement of Stalinist rules in the Soviet Union. The un-enthusiasm within the state-apparatchik circle toward the “thaw” was a result of a cautious stance taken by Czechoslovak Communist leaders who seemed eager to avoid a potential error that could have led to political upheavals similar to that in Poland and Hungary in 1956.<sup>164</sup> In Czechoslovakia, unlike in other Eastern bloc countries, the “de-stalinisation” process and the associated process of liberalisation, both in general and in the realm of architecture, was delayed till around the year 1963 when the economic downturn caused the economists as well as the masses to press for reforms in different aspects of life. The more liberated architectural expressions during around the mid-1960s matched the broader political and social opening of the time. Coincided with the political thaw that was at its peak from the early 1960s to 1968, Czechoslovak architects came to openly voice their dissatisfaction with the aesthetic sterility of the housing estates existed up until that time. This opened the way to a number of proposed experimental projects and the improvement in quality of the architecture compared to the previous phase (pioneering phase). This development in the 1960s which is coined as the “Humanistic” or the “Beautiful phase” stood the experimental estates of *Invalidovna* in the first half of the decade, and *Dáblice*, *Prosek*, *Kobylisy* and *Bohnice* at the latter half.<sup>165</sup> The Utopian architectural designs became very popular among young Czechoslovak architects who joined in a number of architectural competitions available throughout the 1960s at institutional, inter-institutional, and even national levels.<sup>166</sup> In this optimism-charged period, the inspiration from the Postmodernist architecture of the West entered Czechoslovakia, yet the effect of this influence appeared in the actual construction of housing estates as late as the 1980s (the post-technocratic phase) due to the limited possibilities of shaping the prefabricated construction buildings in revolutionary ways, as well as the economic downturn in the first half of the 1960s that led to many ambitious and futuristic projects being neglected, abandoned, or delayed. In Slovak part of the country, the architectural scene lacked behind that of the Czech part, with the modesty of the construction

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<sup>164</sup> Judt, *Post-war*, 436-437.

<sup>165</sup> Flekačová, “Beautiful Boxes or Technocratic Grey?,” 176.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

of the architectural expression being a result of the departure of many prominent Slovak architects who mostly rejected state-socialism.<sup>167</sup>

The 1970s is particularly significant for being the last decade of the extensive housing project proposed and executed by the socialist Czechoslovak state before the direct construction by the central government phased out by the late 1980s. The first half of the 1970s was when the magnitude of housing construction peaked. During this so-called “technocratic phase,” the original plans of these housing estates made by architects were significantly jeopardised as to help ease the construction process associated with the constructing crane routes. Plans were changed by engineers and approved by the state-apparatchiks to avoid the need to keep repeatedly disassembling the cranes and setting the crane-lines anew, thereby helping to reduce construction time and money. Main architects of these technocratic phase housing estates encountered objections of their plans from the state institutions serving as investors or contractors, forcing them into compromises of the architectural and urban qualities of the estates in favour of quantity and economising. These technical and economic restrictions meant that architects could not determine the height levels as well as the scale of individual buildings, and as a result, lost the overall control over the composition of the estates as three-dimensional formations. The distance from the existing urban fabric also meant that the new housing estates needed new costly heating plants as well as long-distance distribution pipeline networks, which in turn jeopardised the investments in other areas such as the social facilities and services and aesthetic aspects of the estates.<sup>168</sup>

Later in the 1980s, the megalomaniac construction programmes were diminished by the severe economic downturn triggered by a slump in foreign trade and increasing debts that struck Czechoslovakia in 1981 and 1982 as well as the long-term unsustainability of uninterrupted urban expansion. Investment in the construction of public housing fell continually from the mid-1980s onwards, falling back to the level of that of the 1960s.<sup>169</sup> This “Post-Technocratic phase” or “Late Socialist Phase” saw the widespread criticism of

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<sup>167</sup> Peter Horak, “Bratislava's changing urban fabric after World War II,” in Benko, *Understanding Post-Socialist European Cities*, 90.

<sup>168</sup> Maier, *Urban Development of Prague*, 57.

<sup>169</sup> Jozsef Hegedüs, “The disintegration of the East European housing model,” in David Clapham, Jozsef Hegedüs, Keith Kintrea, and Iván Tosics, with Helen Kay (eds.), *Housing Privatization in Eastern Europe* (London, Greenwood Press, 43, and, January 1996), 32.

functionalist urban principles, similar to what appeared in the West since the 1960s, and in post-war Czechoslovakia during the short Socialist-Realist era in the 1950s. Not only that Postmodernism revealed itself in many architectural designs of this period, many scholars, planners, and architects published in the official presses their critical objections to the rigidity of standardised volumes and styles, the monopoly of state construction firms, and the neglect of historic urban centres. For the final stage in the history of Czechoslovak mass housing construction, the post-technocratic housing estates represented a move towards the architectural renaissance. Maroš Krivý sees this as the historico-phenomenological turn in late socialist architecture in Czechoslovakia which incorporated two parallel ideas namely postmodernism from the west and post-war domestic kind of “neo-socialist realism” as a way to improve the designs of the existing *Sídliště* and to imbue them with historical meanings.<sup>170</sup>

### **2.3 The technocratic phase *Sídliště* in Czechoslovak big cities: Prague and Bratislava**

As the capital city of Czechoslovakia, Prague, serving as high-status political and administrative centre, was perceived by the top-level governmental decision makers as one of “the most preferential cities” suitable for rapid development and growth, which in turn, also attracted people from all social milieus who perceived Prague as the city with the most desirable living conditions and the best economic potentials and capacities.<sup>171</sup> This led to Prague having the most rapid rate of housing unit construction in Czechoslovakia during the Post-war era. To accommodate the significant increase in population of Prague from the 1970s, the 1975 Comprehensive Plans for Prague and Prague Region mainly proposed the construction of more high-rise housing estates to fill up all the areas enclosed by the outer circular motorway.<sup>172</sup> The construction became in full swing during the 1970s and early 1980s, bringing with it new demographic development as well as physical and social fabric changes of Prague.<sup>173</sup> The most well-known housing estate in Prague from this decade, Jižní Město, was regarded as a good place of residence due to the higher quality of housing

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<sup>170</sup> Krivý, “Postmodernism or Socialist Realism?”

<sup>171</sup> Karel Joseph Kinsky, “Urbanisation under socialism in Czechoslovakia,” *Ekistics* 42:249 (August, 1976), 121-129.

<sup>172</sup> Maier, *Urban Development of Prague*, 55.

<sup>173</sup> Musil, “City development in Central and Eastern Europe before 1990.”

provided in comparison with the relatively cramped and crowded flats in the inner city. A large portion of the new residents were former inhabitants of older housing estates and inner-city tenement houses destroyed as a consequence of inner-city reconstruction programmes.<sup>174</sup>

The plan of the new estate Jižní Město built on blank green field was approved in 1968 after the design competition (held in 1966) which symbolised the spirit of architectural “thaw” that involved the participation of many prominent architects in their optimistic-futuristic designs. Another project which began its planning stage before Normalisation is “Jihoyápadní Město” in the western part of Prague near Prokop valleys, with the public anonymous competition held in 1967-68. Lack of experience of planning and constructing this new type of dwellings, architects worked closely with a number of experts, sociologists, psychologists, and artists to create ideal homes for the new residents, with thoughtfully conceived urban plans. Planners were well aware of the problems of mono-functionality of prior housing projects and their lack of service facilities and tried to avoid repeating the same mistakes. Jižní Město was originally planned to be equipped with facilities such as schools, shopping centres and other social facilities, with pedestrian routes intended for providing the residents with “living, hence city-shaping places for the people to meet.”<sup>175</sup> One of the main architects of the project, Jiří Lasovsky, expected Jižní Město to be the place where “the significant number of work opportunities” were created and as destination where people travelled from other areas of the city to work.”<sup>176</sup>

Unfortunately, these facilities were not a part of the Comprehensive Housing Construction schemes and only existed on papers and not on actual building sites. The main architects of Jižní Město, Jan Krásný and Jiří Lasovský, abandoned their project for political reasons after the onset of Normalisation, leaving the constructors without architectural oversight. The elaborated plan then dissolved into monotony mainly due to the change in design teams after 1970 and the limits of prefabrication technology. The idea of lively

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<sup>174</sup> Daniel Baldwin Hess, Tiit Tammaru, Maarten van Ha, *Housing Estates in Europe: Poverty, Ethnic Segregation and Policy Challenges (The Urban Book Series)*, (Springer International Publishing; Kindle Edition, 2018), Kindle Locations 7993-8000.

<sup>175</sup> “Podrobný územní plán “Jižního Města” v Praze,” *Achitektura ČSR XXVIII* (1969), 7-8, cited and quoted in Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*, 170.

<sup>176</sup> Jiří Lasovsky, “interview with Marta Uhrinová, ‘Jižní Město pražské, Československý architekt XVI,” (1970), 6-7, cited in quoted in Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*, 176.

pedestrian street could not be realized due to the increase in the number of floors which require much greater space between apartment blocks.<sup>177</sup> In case of Jihozápadní Město, though having the main architect, Ivo Oberstein, supervising the whole project from the beginning of planning stage till the end of the construction, many of his ambitious plans also had to be abandoned as the fixed price for all flats meant that the appearance of each flat and the structure of each block had to be the same, limiting the Oberstein's roles in determining the final look of the estate.<sup>178</sup> These problems were not specific to the housing estates in Prague, but also in Bratislava which also saw in the 1970s the similar type of *Sídlišťe* as that of *Jižní Město*, raising the question of the links and similarities (or differences) between these two housing estates built during the early years of Normalisation era.

At the beginning of the 1970s, half of the population of Bratislava lived in mass housing areas.<sup>179</sup> By the end of the Communist era, almost 80 per cent of the citizens of Bratislava lived in prefabricated housing estates. "Petržalka" has got the reputation of being the largest prefabricated housing estate in Slovakia and perhaps also in the whole Central European region, with about 140,000 inhabitants living inside it. The construction of Petržalka was a part of the solution to the under-urbanisation or the low investment in housing under state socialism in Slovak part of Czechoslovakia during the 1960s. It became since then the densest state housing development in East Central Europe, with the share of the residents of Petržalka in the whole population of Bratislava increased from less than 5% in 1970 to about 30% by the end of the 1980s.<sup>180</sup>

This large-scale project was realised with the apparent optimistic aspiration (as taken from the overall look of the top architectural designs that were chosen by the state in the competition in 1968) of creating ideal living space "amidst greenery developed along the romantic arms of the River Danube," as a sociologist Budaj commented in 1987.<sup>181</sup> However, it was the period of Normalisation that brought about the start of construction,

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>179</sup> Horak, *Understanding post-socialist European cities*, 92.

<sup>180</sup> Branislav Bleha, Dagmar Popjaková, "Migration as an important component of future development at the local level - Petržalka city ward case study," *Geografický Časopis* 59:3 (2007), 266-268.

<sup>181</sup> J. Budaj, *Bratislava nahlas (Out of Bratislava)* (Bratislava, SZOPK, 1987), 39 quoted in Pavel Šuška and Linda Stasíková, "Transformation of the built environment in Petržalka pre-fabricated housing estate," *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin* 62:1 (2013), 83-89.

with the state building organisation Stavoprojekt being authorised to realise the project. One scholar described the finished urban structure of Petržalka as:

“an intricate, loose structure with broadly opened inline housing blocks, indicated streets delimited by slab-like barrier blocks. The whole structure is supplemented by unattached high-rise housing structures, octagonal and hexagonal configuration. The influence was noticeable on the layout of the external envelope on fourteen polyfunctional apartment blocks. The four to eight-storey housing blocks are combined with solitaire twelve-storey blocks. Because of a high level of ground waters, all blocks are based on piles. Thus, the cellars are located on the ground floor. That added inhospitableness to the settlement.”<sup>182</sup>

By the mid-1980s, Petržalka had become an infamous symbol of the country's housing estate failure, something that Slovak people were “ashamed of.”<sup>183</sup> The site of the estate also had direct impacts on the outlines of transportation system in Bratislava, and the other way round. Both in Prague and Bratislava during the 1960s and the early 1970s, new estates were planned and built before the existence of the main commute lines that connected them to the city cores. In Bratislava, the plan to build a metro system originated in 1974, one year after the construction of Petržalka began. The actual construction, however, started 14 years later in 1988 with the main aim of servicing the residents of the housing estate. The architects of the metro expressed their optimistic aspiration of how the existence of the metro system would transform Petržalka for the better, with the construction of the main compositional axis of Petržalka and a lively residential boulevard and all the facilities being created as soon as the district is fully connected to the central core of the city.<sup>184</sup> A couple of months later, state socialism abruptly ended and the construction of the whole system of metro lines stopped altogether, leaving Bratislava until today with an unfinished metro system that cannot be ridden on, and Petržalka with unfinished metro train depot in the south with no lively residential boulevard connected to it as was optimistically anticipated.

However, there is one element that these estates took pride in. Similar to that of Prague's Jižní Město, the residents of Petržalka during the state socialism could be generally

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<sup>182</sup> H. Moravčíková, *Bratislava Atlas sídlisk (Bratislava Atlas of Mass Housing)*, (2011), cited in Bohumil Kováč, Peter Horák, *Fifty Years since the international competition on urban planning* (2016), 218-219.

<sup>183</sup> Budaj, *Bratislava nahlas*, 40.

<sup>184</sup> Petr Gibas, “Edge of Existence: Abandoned Bratislava Metro, in Paul Dobraszczyk, Carlos Lopez Galviz, and Bradley L. Garrett, *Global Undergrounds: Exploring Cities within* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2016).

characterised as young and economically active-age educated middle-class, with more than half of them having above secondary level education. A remarkably high social mix of various occupational groups was a characteristic of these estates which, in turn, were more socially mixed than the older parts of the city. Even until today, the Czech Republic and Slovakia also take great pride in their status as the most egalitarian nations within the European Union. It is uncanny that there are connections between this current situation and the condition induced by the centrally planned urban system during the socialist era.

As could be observed, the first phase of planning of the housing estates Jižní Město and Petržalka saw the international competitions for their designs which then were chosen by the state. These competitions predated the Normalisation era and therefore could be seen as part of the liberalised climate of the 1960s. These large-scale estates were creatively designed and carefully planned, with experts from different fields such as scientists, sociologists, and architects who spent far more time studying ideas and designs than was the case with most other neighbourhoods in the country. The plan for the construction of large-scale housing estates of the technocratic phase in Czechoslovakia can, therefore, be considered one of the most well-thought-out urban plans ever, with so many interesting designs contested for being chosen to be officially implemented. Both districts Jižní Město and Petržalka were not conceived, in their original intent, as a “living bedroom” as critics later referred to them. Nevertheless, as the scholar Karel Maier argues, “while a wide scope of interesting patterns can be found on plans, not much can be observed by a visitor who moves along the streets.”<sup>185</sup> This is as if the estates were constructed to satisfy those who created them and not for the residents who were to spend their lives in them. In the end, the outcomes of the competitions and the actual realisation of the plans were determined by a government ministry's subjective preferences, production quotas, and the limits of standardisation. The lack of services which characterizes Jižní Město and Petržalka is typical aspect which could be found in most socialist cities, and therefore, could not be seen as an element specific to Czechoslovak *Sídliště*, but more as a result of general economic problems and the over-ambitious/hard-to-achieve aspirations of the socialist state planners and

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<sup>185</sup> Maier, *Urban Development of Prague*, 75.

ideologues who symbolised the general contemporary optimism for the ideal socialist future which existed, as history unfolded, only in the first two decades of post-war state-socialism.



**Figure 5:** Planning the public space of Jižní Město (the 1970s)<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> “Dobová fotografie Jižního města zachycující práce na sídlišti.” Retrieved from: [www.blesk.cz/galerie/regiony-praha-praha-zpravy/511524/pred-40-lety-se-zacala-psat-panelstory-jizniho-mesta-praha-11-oslavi-kulate-narozneniny?foto=6](http://www.blesk.cz/galerie/regiony-praha-praha-zpravy/511524/pred-40-lety-se-zacala-psat-panelstory-jizniho-mesta-praha-11-oslavi-kulate-narozneniny?foto=6), Accessed: 21 July 2019.





**Figure 6:** Prague's Jižní Město in the 1980s (Photographs by Jaromír Čejka)<sup>187</sup>

<sup>187</sup> Dufek, *Jaromír Čejka*, 165, 123.

## 2.4 Spatio-temporal analyses in architecture and suburbanisation of the technocratic phase *Sídliště* in Prague and Bratislava and the impacts on the residents

Prague's Jižní Město and Bratislava's Petržalka have a lot in common in terms of their history, with both having the beginning period of their construction during the peak of the technocratic phase in the 1970s. It was not only the architecture or the ideas behind their architecture that made these housing estates the emblems of the late socialist time in Czechoslovakia, but also their scope and visual dimensions in comparison to what existed elsewhere and what existed before (hence spatio-temporal). This section will analyse the biggest *Sídliště* of the technocratic phase in big cities of Czechoslovakia, namely Prague's Jižní Město and Bratislava's Petržalka in relation to the dwellings available in other parts within the country, to see how the architecture, spatial delimitation, and landscapes of those suburban housing estates created a new spatio-temporal demarcation line that not only separated the space, but also the time before and after the creation of these estates.

Just like how Nikita Khrushchev during the 1950s and 1960s introduced a mass housing program that moved millions of Soviet citizens from the overcrowded communal apartments and dormitories that symbolized the lifestyle of ordinary citizens during the Stalinist era to single-family separate apartments, the Normalisation era in Czechoslovakia brought about similar phenomenon, with both signifying “the final transition to Communism.”<sup>188</sup> Steven E. Harris has discussed about Khrushchev's desire to create an all-inclusive “Communist way of life” through the construction of mass housing, and the strategies of the residents inside the new style of housing estates (termed as Khrushchyovki) to adapt and cope with the new type of living space which suffered from poor designs and half-built neighborhoods with little infrastructure.<sup>189</sup> Christine Varga-Harris contends that this new lifestyle in a separate flat was “a key entitlement in a renegotiated social contract between the state and society.”<sup>190</sup> Within this new kind of large-scale housing districts, The problem of apartment “squatting” was reported to be rampant, with squatters taking flats in illegal means before the buildings were completed and inspected. The configuration of

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<sup>188</sup> Steven E. Harris, “Soviet Mass Housing and the Communist Way of Life,” in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Life in Russia Past and Present* (Indiana University Press, 2015).

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>190</sup> Christina Varga-Harris, “Forging Citizenship on the Home Front: Reviving the Socialist Contract and Constructing Soviet Identity during the Thaw,” paraphrased in Harris, “Soviet mass housing,” 251.

Khrushchyovki, arguably, rather than being a liberalisation of attitudes in the realm of housing for the masses, worked as a well-developed system of total surveillance, with each citizen still possessing the power to watch one another in a much more refined and hidden nature, inside the new settings of living environment. In these large-scale housing estates, where, although each family got a separate flat, the spatial settings and the division of housing units (into groups of flats on each floor, and blocks of flats on each estate) created a condition whereby hierarchical observation in the similar sense as what Foucault articulated became much more entrenched. The question arose is whether we can also view technocratic phase *Sídliště* and the effects on the residents in the same sense as that of Khrushchyovki in the post-war Soviet Union.

As disciplines that revolve around the notion of “space”, Architectural psychology and Environmental psychology which study the impact of (physical) environments on human behaviour, has revealed how human behaviour is determined not just by individual personality traits, but also by the environment and the landscape in which that behaviour takes place, the amount of time spent in such environment, the sensory associations with the environment, and by the past environmental experiences.<sup>191</sup> Stephen Bittner argues that the configuration of cities was “the strongest factor for organising the psyche of the masses.”<sup>192</sup> Architectural historian John Archer sees the interior and exterior space produced by architecture as dialogical and political apparatuses which frame inhabitant's identity.<sup>193</sup> It is clear that “space” is never disconnected from the society that produces it, reflecting the cultural context in which it resides while at the same time gives concrete form to culture, and in a way, is a kind of cultural marker that can be observed and analysed.

Material surroundings play a big role in determining consciousness and changing how a person think and behave. As we spend most of our lives around our shelters, the configuration of neighbourhood and architecture and design of dwellings could produce a big impact on our psych. Poorly designed and maintained residential space can be detrimental to the mental health of the inhabitants, creating a sense of nervousness and fearfulness by visually activating the nervous system. The constant exposure to the dullness of the repetitive architectural style can produce the sense of boredom which is correlated

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<sup>191</sup> P. A. Bell, *Environmental psychology* (New York: Psychology Press, 2011).

<sup>192</sup> Stephen Bittner, “Green Cities and Orderly Streets. Space and Culture in Moscow, 1928-1933,” *Journal of Urban History* 25:1 (November, 1998), 24.

<sup>193</sup> Archer, *Architecture and Suburbia*.

with stress and frustration. Monochromatic colours and a lack of architectural details and human touch lead to sensory deprivation. The uniformity in house form with common material structure and interior layouts could homogenise domestic settings as well as domestic behaviours and values. In this way, urban planning and architecture could be seen as working as “an instrument of regimentation of life.”<sup>194</sup> It could be argued, therefore, that the architectural form and physical environment of houses have a crucial social-transformative role in the lives of the residents.

In the same sense as that articulated by the Frankfurt School theorists, James C. Scott uses the term “marginalization of resistance in the name of science” when discussing the method the socialist regime used in preventing the subjects from revolting, by articulating its directions with “scientific” attitude towards the relationship between the Party and the masses.<sup>195</sup> With this kind of reasoning, the regime seemed to have always produced the ideologically justified objective stance that precluded any possibility for it to be attacked by its critics. The rationalisation of the “objective” relationship between the masses and the party was described by historian Vanda Thorne as followed: “the individual did not mean anything unless s/he was a part of the masses that in turn could not function properly unless they were led by the Communist Party.”<sup>196</sup> This very same ideology is manifested within the architecture of functionalist *Sídliště*, with each flat forms a tiny box, like an organ, within the larger body structure which visually demonstrates the homogenisation of each box. Each box of flats is dependent on the existence of the others, as to form the harmonious and uniform grid structure of a Panelák that would then be symmetrically placed alongside the other paneláky to form a *Sídliště*, all of which are state-sanctioned entities. Architecture in everyday life, therefore, can reflect the core ideology which assist the functions of a system, without one having to read the official ideology.

Crucially, the late socialist *Sídliště* was commonly considered as a new type of housing environment in Czechoslovakia at the time they were built in the early 1970s.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Donna Birdwell-Pheasant, Denise Lawrence-Zuniga, *House Life Space, Place and Family in Europe* (London: Broomsbury, 1999), 27-28.; Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 156.

<sup>195</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 55.

<sup>196</sup> Vanda Thorne, *Ideologies and realities of the masses in communist Czechoslovakia* (Central European University, 1997), 50.

<sup>197</sup> Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*, 266.

The new residents moved into a new kind of high-rise housing, finding themselves living higher off the ground than they and their older generations had ever experienced. Prior to the beginning of the technocratic phase of panel housing construction in Czechoslovakia, the height of the apartment buildings never exceeded five floors due to the unavailability of lifts. The movement of a large proportion of Czechoslovak citizens into high-rise panel buildings meant that, for the first time, Czechoslovak citizens became exposed to a new world of senses and phenomena mutually experienced through the new kind of vertical living that neither they nor their ancestors had ever experienced before. This was a radical break with the past in terms of living style and environment.

These housing estates of the technocratic phase were special not only due to how they gave new experience to their residents, but also because of their localities, with their sites being far detached from the already existed urban centres. Their visual dimensions were so different even from the housing estates built in the previous post-war decades in the 1950s and the 1960s. Zarecor and Špacková comment:

"One panelák might not be so "big," but a development of dozens of buildings starts to take on the character of a massive single architectural effort. One that is disengaged from its context and site, and becomes its own "raison d'être" in the sense that the neighborhoods created their own landscapes, essentially self-contained worlds of home and leisure life in dialectical tension with the productive spaces of work and industry."<sup>198</sup>

Not only that this unique identity of suburban *Sídlišťe* in Prague and Bratislava was formed due to their sites, scales, and irregular architectural features in comparison to what existed in the city cores, the uniqueness of them was also due to their own identity as a "place for sleeping in" or a "bedroom of the city." From the very beginning of their existence, these newly built suburban estates developed their own identity separated from that of their urban centres and historical cores. In the case of Prague's Jižní Město, it was not fit in the "sense of Prague" by its residents who would use the term "going to Prague" interchangeably with "going to the city centre" or the historical core of Prague.<sup>199</sup> Petržalka also got a similar reputation, of being a part of Bratislava but at the same time never "of it". The district was

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<sup>198</sup> Eva Špačková, Kimberly Elman Zarecor, "Czech Panelaks are Disappearing, But the Housing Estates Remain," *Architektura & urbanismus* 46:3-4 (2012), 297.

<sup>199</sup> This also applies to those living in the other area of urban fringes, regardless of types of houses and also for the case of tourists who visit Prague.

for many centuries a rural settlement outside of the core of Bratislava before it was transformed by the extensive construction of *Sídliska* from the early 1970s. With distinct characteristics together with the natural physical barrier of the Danube which divides the district from the old city core, people who lived in the historical core developed the status of “old city citizens” as to differentiate themselves from the “Petržalka citizens.” Most of the residents of Petržalka, like those who lived in Jižní Město, had to commute to work in other parts of the cities. At the beginning when these estates were in the planning process, in relation to the solution of congestion in the centre, the industrial jobs were expected to be moved into the outskirts as to decentralise jobs, which in turn would lead to the need for the building of new large industrial estates on the urban fringe. In reality, the number of jobs created in there could not match the number of residents living in the suburb, leading to many residents calling these urban fringe estates merely as their “bedrooms” or “dormitories.” Their dependency on the city centres and their spatial segregation from the traditional city cores were criticised since the very beginning of their creations.

One typical aspect of the ideology behind socialist urbanism is the desire to abolish the contradictions between city and countryside, aiming at homogenisation and elimination of differences between regions within the country and between neighbourhoods within cities. Population and the productive activities were expected to be decentralized from the traditional city core. This was believed to be achieved through the construction of the new satellite towns that could independently function on their own. However, the Technocratic phase *Sídlišťe* in Prague and Bratislava amplified the peripheral contradictions. Ian Hamilton suggested how the construction of suburban housing estates in the post-war Eastern bloc countries had brought about a spatio-temporal pattern, in which “outward expansion of city areas yields a concentric-zonal pattern” with the “pre-socialist inner and socialist outer urban areas” being fundamentally distinct in terms of architecture and skylines.<sup>200</sup> Although the historical core accounts for less than 5 per cent in terms of the administrative area of Prague, yet it has been the most known and most concerned area of the capital country, or in other words, the heart of Prague in terms of geography and its importance. New concern of scale between distant buildings comprised of high-rise and large-scale suburban *Sídlišťe* seen from distant viewpoints of the visual horizons of Prague core emerged during the mid-1970s when

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<sup>200</sup> F E. I. Hamilton, and G J. R. Linge, *Spatial Analysis, Industry and the Industrial Environment: Progress in Research and Applications* (Chichester: John Wiley, 1979), 227.

the negative visual impact of these buildings on the panorama of Prague observed from the Prague historical core was evaluated by planners, and in a way, situating Prague core in direct opposition with the newly built Technocratic phase *Sídliště* which was treated as an “eyesore”, something that should be fixed so that the beautiful panoramic view of Prague is preserved.<sup>201</sup>

This kind of spatial fragmentation within post-war cities such as in Prague and Bratislava could be argued to have led to deeper psychological conditions that are not easy to be observed. Psychoanalysis would posit that the spatial conflict between the new architecture within a new suburban style and that of the old city core went hand in hand with the spatial division between the ruler and the ruled, or the government (with its sites located in the centre) and the majority of ordinary citizens (who lived in the suburb). Moving out from the former living environment within the city cores or from the countryside and then being placed within the new kind of urban style and living environment which was hard for one to identify with, the residents of the technocratic phase *Sídliště* in big cities, arguably, could develop the sense of nostalgia for their past living locations and, simultaneously, the hidden sense of estrangement caused by the policy of the state government which imposed the new living lifestyle on them, creating a distinct new identity for the new residents of the estates which were far detached from that of the city core. Not being fully and conveniently linked to the core with adequate public transport system, the new technocratic *Sídliště* in Prague and Bratislava formed a kind of suburban enclave for the residents. It could be argued that it was the government and its suburban plan for the cities that indirectly created the kind of spatial antagonism between the governors and the governed who seemed to be physically allocated into two distinct spaces, clearly separated from one another. In a way, the line is drawn not only on the urban and suburban paper plans, but also on the mental map possessed by all the residents who then formed an identity in opposition to the state. This argument could be analysed further in the future research. The nostalgic yearning for traditional architecture and urban plans that characterise what could be found in the city cores will be discussed in the next chapter when discussing about the architectural critique of *Sídliště*.

According to architectural and environmental psychology, the physical environment is argued to be one crucial core of what scholars have termed the “sense of place.” Using a

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<sup>201</sup> Maier, *Urban Development of Prague*, 86, 104.

humanistic perspective in human geography, DeMiglio and Williams have discussed this notion of “sense of place” and its elements namely “rootedness, belonging, place identity, meaningfulness, place satisfaction and emotional attachment”, all of which are the products of “interconnected psychological, social and environmental processes in relation to physical place(s) ... (as) ... localized, bounded and material geographical entity, and the sentiments of attachment and detachment that humans experience and express in relation to specific places.”<sup>202</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz claims that “meaning” is the fundamental human need, and a person could live in a meaningful way only in a place where one could orient oneself well, as he articulates:

“To gain an existential foothold man has to be able to orientate himself; he has to know where he is. But he also has to identify himself with the environment, that is, he has to know how he is in a certain place.” A place created identity by focusing or gathering up the natural surrounding and bringing them close to humans in an enclosure. This, the true purpose of the art of building was not to make a functional shelter but to build an existential home for humans in the environment.”<sup>203</sup>

Being disoriented inside the environment, at the urban level at large, and at the estate units, this could cause the loss in the “sense of place” of the residents, which then would lead them to search for the “sense of home”, not elsewhere, but within their own space where they have an agency to make change to the environment. Zooming in at Paneláky units and each flat inside them, Krisztina Féherváry talks of what can be interpreted as “the spatial tension” between the Outside space and the Inside space within the large-scale socialist housing estates:

“People strove to transform the interiors of apartments into heterotopic private spaces utterly distinct from the buildings that surrounded them, in stark opposition to the perception that these public spaces (...) belonged to an impersonal, unitary state. Apartments were inhabited as spaces of ‘normality’ clearly delineated materially, aesthetically, and

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<sup>202</sup> John Eyles and Alison Williams (eds.), *Sense of Place, health, and quality of life* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 26. Also see E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976).

<sup>203</sup> Kate Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory, 1965-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 426, 423.



politically from the abnormal politics present in the public space during the socialist and post-socialist periods.”<sup>204</sup>

The domestic space, according to Dorothee Wierling, constitutes the “private sphere” which is the least susceptible to ideological impositions.<sup>205</sup> People made themselves at home through material practices of flat decorations, creating meaningful selves that could be presented to their friends and visitors. Nonetheless, to a certain extent, if we were to view these acts as a kind of private resistance in the form of home decorations, it could be argued that this actually “reinforced” rather than “undermined” the existing ideology, such as that of Normalisation in post-1968 Czechoslovakia. This is what Žižek calls “false exits”, a kind of private rebellion that did not challenge the existing ideology but became a routine to be commonly practised, and in a way, is the best account of how “actually existing Socialism” functioned in everyday life of most Czechoslovak citizens during the late socialism. To what extent is this claim valid is not main the interest of this thesis. What is of interest here is how the critiques of *Sídliště* voiced their opinions with regard to this kind of retreat into the private sphere within one's flat, the issue which will be analysed in the next chapter.

Crucially, an interesting insight is manifested by Martin Veselý, who interviewed the residents of Prague's Jižní Město as to study the identification of its residents with the surroundings of their housing estate. Veselý has contended that the physical environment of the housing estate plays a subsidiary role in the process of identification with the place.<sup>206</sup> “In many cases, we do not even value the places themselves as much as what they represent for us, for example, our memories, current/past social ties or persons,” one of Veselý's interviewees argued.<sup>207</sup> After analysing the recorded interviews, Veselý gives an insightful conclusion as followed:

“The physical environment is for participants usually only a backdrop against which the stories play out that gives a place unique significance. The main actors in these stories are not the places in the physical sense, but instead the people with their experiences and recollections

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<sup>204</sup> Krisztina Fehérváry, *Politics in color and concrete: socialist materialities and the middle class in Hungary* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2013), 16, 19, 29, 37, quoted in Hess, *Housing Estates in Europe*.

<sup>205</sup> Dorothee Wierling, "Everyday Life and Gender Relations," in Alf Ludtke (trans.), William Templer, *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 151.

<sup>206</sup> Martin Veselý, “My Estate Is My Home,” in Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*, 244.

<sup>207</sup> Cassi Pelikánová's comment as appeared in *Ibid.*, 247.

accumulated in one place. Thanks to these memories, in their localness (but only within the memories) the concrete appears less grey, the public space more meaningful, and the apartment blocks even take on a more human scale.”<sup>208</sup>

Veselý sees this positive identification and satisfaction (retrospectively) with one’s own home and neighbourhood, regardless of the negative stereotypes and defects, as resulting from the process of accumulation of meanings called “Patina” or the psychological effect of “cognitive dissonance”, both of which explain how people have a tendency to judge positively the situations and places in which they find themselves in and deny most of the negatives.<sup>209</sup> Nonetheless, this does not mean that all were sunshine and roses. Petržalka was the leading region of suicide in the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia during the Communist time.<sup>210</sup> Thomas K. Murphy argues that while clinical depression was rampant in socialist Czechoslovakia, the state government was “traditionally loathe to attempt at connecting socialist architecture with suicide and mental illness” though “there is an almost immediate anecdotal association in the mind of the general population.”<sup>211</sup> Drawing from Budaj’s research in 1987 which studies the socio-psychological adaptations of residents in Petržalka, Linda Stasíková talks specifically of three types of adaptation/coping mechanism the residents who moved to newly built Petržalka used as to adjust themselves to the unfavourable environment they had to face.<sup>212</sup> The first one is labelled as “passive” (anti-social behaviours, and withdrawal into ones’ own flats, no payment), the second is “aggressive” (robbery of properties, physical harassment, and vandalism), and the third is “self-destructive” (neurosis, alcoholism, drug abuse, and suicide). Furthermore, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the number of marriages in Czechoslovakia declined while the number of divorces significantly increased, raising the question of the correlations between this trend and the increasing number of citizens who lived inside the technocratic phase *Sídliště*, the question which could be addressed in future research (The rate of divorce

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>210</sup> Thomas K. Murphy, *Czechoslovakia Behind the Curtain: Life, Work and Culture in the Communist Era* (N.C: McFarland, 2018), 55. This correlation between suicides and the high-rise buildings could also be the case due to the fact that the sites (high-rise) gave more people a mean of killing themselves.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Linda Stasíková, “Genius loci vo vzťahu k strachu zo zločinnosti na príklade postsocialistického sídliska,” *Geografický časopis* 65:83-101 (2013), 89.

climbed from 14 per cent in 1970 to 32 per cent in 1985).<sup>213</sup> Also, in her analysis of the large-scale apartment blocks, Gerasimova explores the tactics used by residents to minimize the social tensions, particularly the tactic of “depersonalizing” their own neighbours and turning them into “mere elements of the setting” or, in other words, people into things.<sup>214</sup> Along the same lines, recent researches in psychology in the topic of social isolation have proven that residents of large-scale high-rise housing estates are reported to feel a greater sense of loneliness and isolation.<sup>215</sup> Sharing semi-public spaces with strangers made residents more suspicious of their neighbours than the opposite, with the public space inside the building itself depriving them of the sense of community. Ilja Skoček talks of the “suffocation of individuality” as the direct result of the standardisation and the dullness of the socialist housing estates. The next chapter will try to locate these claims within the critiques of *Sídliště* during the late socialist time up until the end of the socialist regime in 1989, as to see the connections between the issues that were attacked by the critics and dissidents and the conditions that have demonstrated in this section.

Crucially, each flat inside the technocratic phase *Sídliště* seemed to have been constructed as a private space with public ideological qualities, also always open to outside inspection, such as from state-agent authorities. The theory (official ideology and its aspirations) and the reality of people’s private lives here, therefore, greatly contradicted. The gap between official propaganda and citizens’ lived experience appears to be wide. The imposed ideological models that favoured the notion on community and collectivism, paradoxically, caused the unintended outcomes such as that of the homogenization of the private spaces, the divorce and abortion patterns, and the deprivation of the sense of social connections. The analysis on the shortcomings of the state’s ideologies and its policies with regard to housing and quality of life, therefore, needs to be taken into consideration the fact that these outcomes were not the fulfilment of the original intent, but rather a by-product of it.

Nevertheless, paradoxically, the yearning for the sense of community and social connections could manifest itself elsewhere, despite not within the state-sanctioned housing

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<sup>213</sup> Gawdiak, *Czechoslovakia: a country study*.

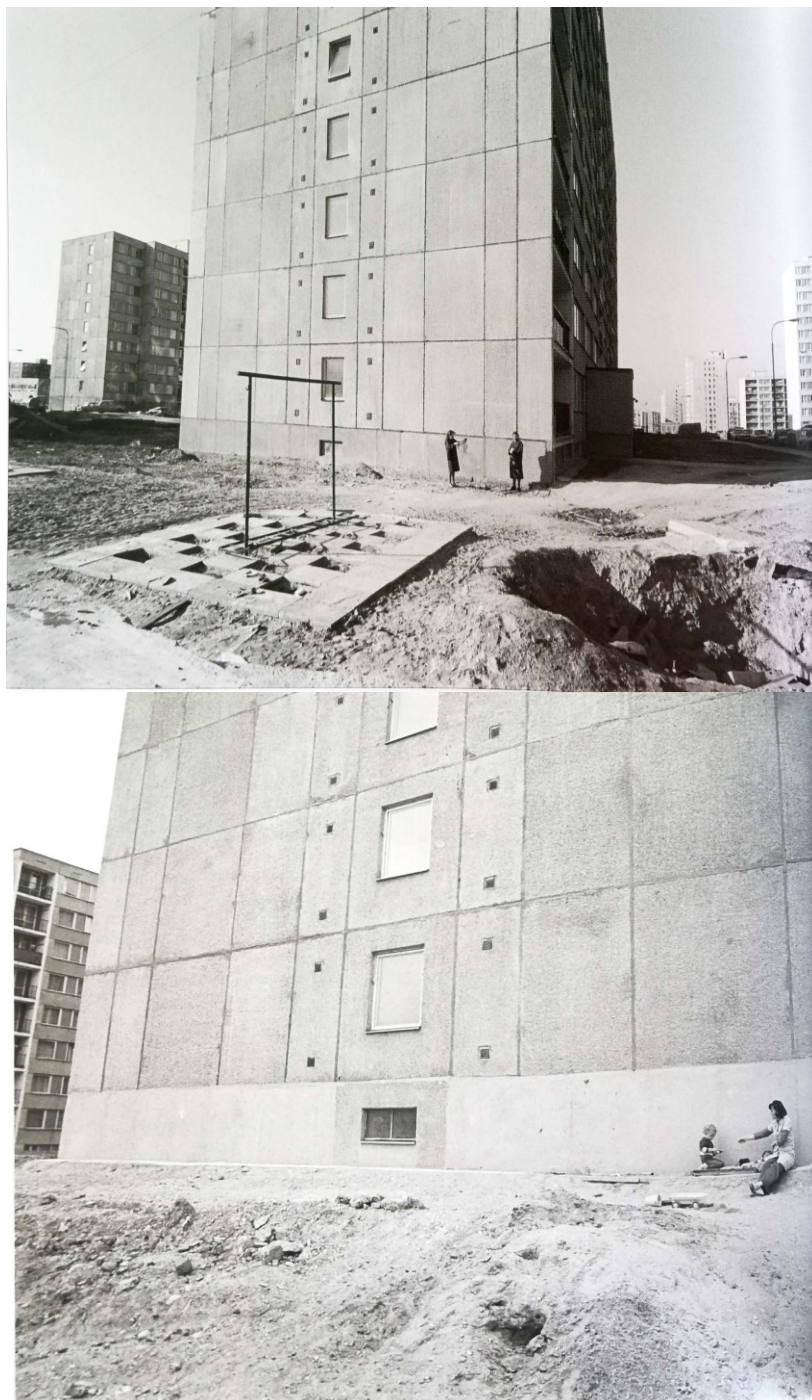
<sup>214</sup> Crowley, *Socialist Spaces*, 15.

<sup>215</sup> Andrea Wigfield, “Assessing the Effectiveness of social indices to measure the prevalence of social isolation in neighbourhoods: a qualitative sense check of an index in a northern English city,” *Social Indicators Research* 140:3 (December, 2018), 1017-1034.

estates that pleaded for the notion of collectivism. Taken from Foucault notion of the state which suggests that instead of viewing it as a subject that wields its power on the ordinary citizens, the “state” should rather be viewed as an everyday “practice”. In this context of late socialist Czechoslovakia, the everyday “practice” of the socialist masses, not only were involuntarily homogenized through their remarkably private lives inside technocratic phase *Sídliště*, but the psychological impact of the living environment inside these estates where many of the citizens lived in itself, had caused them “en-masse” into the common search for a kind of meaningful social lives, which were then handed back to them in the forms of mass events such as parades, public collective rituals, official ceremonies, and the country-wide mass gymnastic performances (the famous Spartakiads), all of which were, paradoxically again, centrally organized by the state. The fact that these events were very well received by the Czechoslovak citizens, being participated by millions of Czechoslovak masses, demonstrates how the knits of everyday life “practice” inform one another and work as underpinning for each other. By exploring the everyday of the ordinary citizens, it could be observed that the official sanctioned discourses such as that in the form of “quality of life” rhetoric mattered more at the spiritual level, rather than at physical levels. This argument will be discussed in the next chapter.

All these analyses add to an already complex overview of “what happened” in late socialist Czechoslovakia, beginning with the yearning for the sense of “national” community after the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy which was translated into a “national” style of “High-modernist” architecture, then to the post-war socialist regime’s borrowing from the avant-garde modernists the architectural ‘harmony’ in the form of functionalist *Sídliště* that was also filled with socialist collectivist ideology, then to the loss of this same sense of collectivism within the real practice of the residents living inside these functionalist estates, before ending this long chain of practices with the strong plea for the sense of community and meanings that were lost along the way. This yearning for the sense of community (particularly manifested in the form of a national community, and quiet well-knitted small

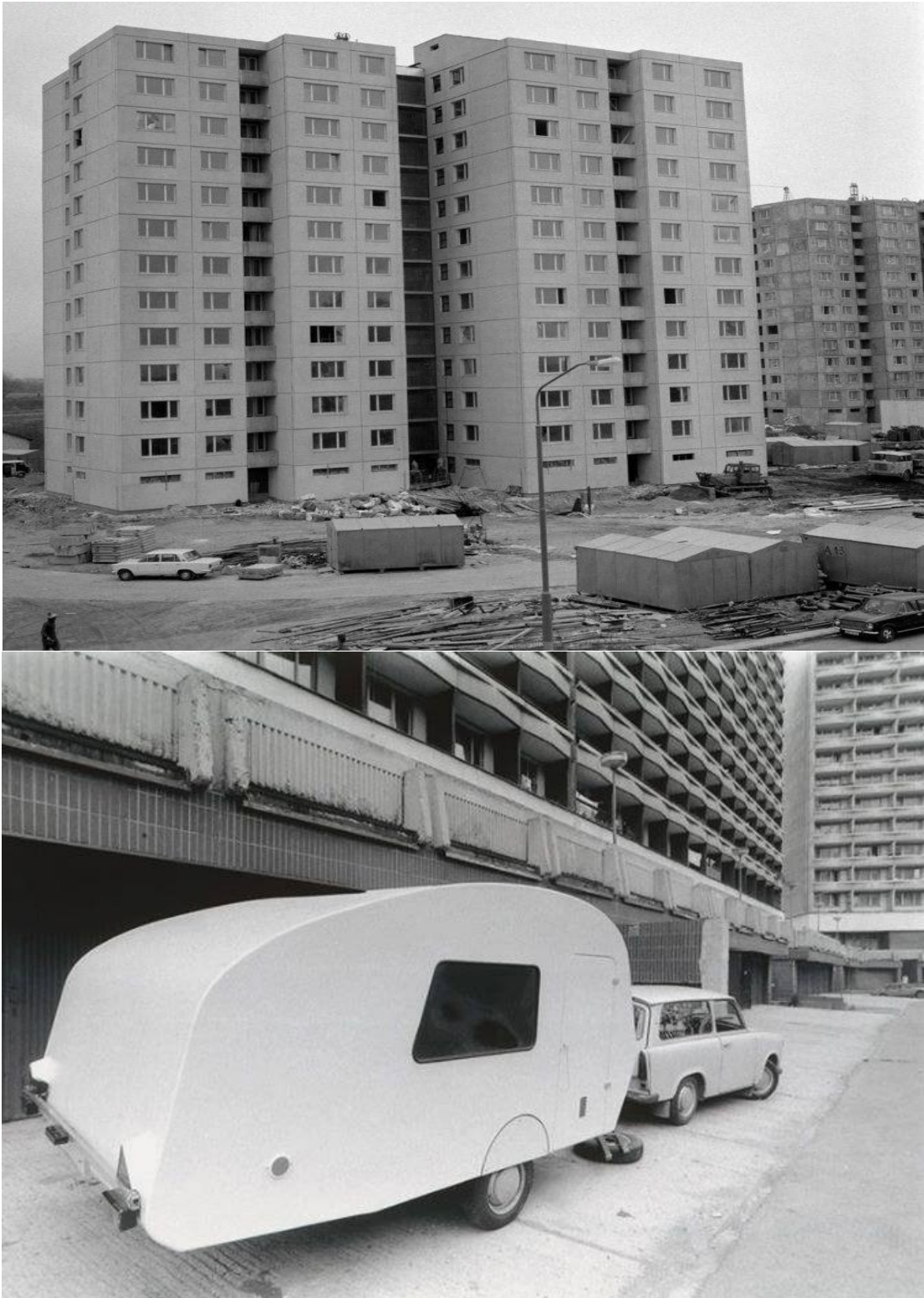
community) and meanings in life will be discussed in the next chapter when discussing many points articulated within the critiques of *Sídliště* during the late socialism.



**Figure 7:** Prague's Jižní Město in the 1980s (Photographs by Jaromír Čejka)<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Dufek, *Jaromír Čejka - Jižní Město*, 64, 48.



**Figure 8:** Bratislava's Petržalka in the 1970s-80s<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> "5/27-Petržalka 70,80-tých rokov," Retrieved from: [www.facebook.com/BratislavaaajejPremeny/photos/a.1835797510077684/1835797883410980/?type=3&theater](https://www.facebook.com/BratislavaaajejPremeny/photos/a.1835797510077684/1835797883410980/?type=3&theater); [www.facebook.com/BratislavaaajejPremeny/photos/a.1835797510077684/1835799426744159/?type=3&theatre](https://www.facebook.com/BratislavaaajejPremeny/photos/a.1835797510077684/1835799426744159/?type=3&theatre), Accessed 25 July 2019.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Critiques of *Sídliště***

Shortly after the fall of Communism in Europe, the blanket condemnations of the housing estate reached their culmination. In media, the housing estates were portrayed as the negative symbol of socialism and the remnant of the past regime which people only wanted to forget.<sup>218</sup> After the Velvet revolution, *sídliště* became directly associated with the notion of socialist “totalitarianism” and the yearning for the traditional architecture of the nation took a turn, as articulated in an article in the architectural journal in 1990:

“The totalitarian system in our country is probably already something that belongs to the past. However, it left us large construction enterprises that can, for several years from now, destroy our cities from within. (...) Architects were made to take a subsidiary role to that of the construction company. Soulless grey mass of concrete devoid of all human feelings is a manifestation of the totalitarian system of the old regime in the past forty years. To continue with such construction is the same as to accept the oppression even after the (Velvet) revolution has been successful. Therefore, we demand an immediate end to panel constructions in Liberec district, even at the cost of huge financial losses. Only a radical solution to this problem will prevent further devastation of our city. We want a space for architecture to be full-fledged and multifaceted, following the best traditions of our country.”<sup>219</sup>

As shown above, criticism seems to be easy when history has already shown you to be right. The question arose is what about the criticism before 1989? It seems that the seeds of the post-Communist critique of *Sídliště* in similar nature had already been sown during the late socialism. In Czechoslovakia, widespread dissatisfaction with the *Sídliště* was firmly established by the end of the 1970s, which also coincided with the time when the declaration of Charter 77 on human-rights principles went into circulation. Crucially, the time when critiques of *Sídliště* escalated from the late 1970s also coincided with the peak time of the architectural industrialization of housing estate construction as well as the reintroduction of

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<sup>218</sup> Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*, 275.

<sup>219</sup> “Architekt” (duben, 1990), 2, in Pelikán, “Bydlení u Kosmonautů a v Centru Vesmíru,” 62.

Postmodernism and the revival of Socialist Realism (sorela) in Czechoslovakia, raising the question of the nature of relationships among these phenomena.

Historians have long been engaged with the connections between political fight against Communist rule and the postmodernist art that peaked in Czechoslovakia during the 1970s and the 1980s before seemingly vanished altogether after the end of the Velvet Revolution. Czechoslovak postmodernist art and cultural production of the late socialism, therefore, was interconnected to the political dissidence of its time, with the end of the latter coinciding with the end of the first. Films and artworks mirrored late socialist society while at the same time existed as indirect critiques of the system. Architecture in Czechoslovakia, which could arguably be perceived as a form of art, however, could not fit well into this teleological lens, with many postmodernist architectural designs cannot be read as products of dissenting architects. However, the other way round does not comply.

Some space appeared to exist for dissidents within the socio-political environment of late socialism to venture around, at different extents, in the domain of Social critique, Philosophical critique, Artistic critique, Architectural Critique, and Spatio-Temporal Critique of the architecture and living environment of technocratic phase *Sídliště*. Although these critiques could not be neatly separated, I try to put them into categories in order to demonstrate the distinctive nature of each group and to show how despite not sharing a single method and ideology, they did share an essential engine for politics that could be transformed into political action. This chapter will look at different poles of criticism to which large-scale housing estates were subjected during the 1970s and 1980s in Czechoslovakia and to see whether these critiques could be placed within the context of the dissatisfaction in socialist system and the broader political and intellectual context of late socialist Czechoslovakia.

### **3.1 Social critique of *Sídliště*: “quality of life” and “psychological well-being”**

The direction of the social critique of *Sídliště* of technocratic phase took a socio-psychological form within the background of a new European-wide geopolitical situation in the 1970s which raised questions related to environment and well-being. The view of piles of concrete panels, walking paths full of rubble and dust is typical of what can be seen in



many photographs taken in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the late socialist housing estates, raising the contemporary concern of the negative impact of large-scale construction on nature and environment. Young architects and experts asserted their critical stance during the course of the 1980s in periodic journals against this type of *Sídliště* which for them had caused a socio-psychological impact on the residents. The twin issues of “quality of life” and “psychological well-being” became the main topics within the public discourse in the last decade of state-socialism.

These concerns, however, were not the phenomenon specific to the 1980s. As early as 1946, architects voiced the aspiration to provide all citizens with “well-organised flats, what would make their life more practical with the provision of air, sunlight and greenery, hygiene and genuine cultivation of living.”<sup>220</sup> These aspirations were given the space to actually materialise after the grand policy to build 1,200,000 million flats by 1970. A couple of years after this policy was implemented, similar aspirations were reflected in the report related to the plans of future dwellings and the interior design in 1963 by Musil.<sup>221</sup> His overview report of the contemporary situation of housing in Czechoslovakia took into account not only the economic considerations related to the construction, but also the sociological factors including the development of communal services and shopping facilities, the evolution of the Socialist family, the changes in the standard of living, the privacy of the inhabitants, and their social contacts within the dwelling and in the neighbourhood.<sup>222</sup> Musil anticipated several socio-economic changes that would determine the plans of the housing estates that were to be built by the beginning of the 1970s. Factors such as the increase in the employment rates of women coupled with the development of public services at the time were read as a precondition for the decrease in the economic as well as protective functions of the family, the changes which, for Musil, were worth taken into consideration when planning for the construction and the design of the dwelling.<sup>223</sup> For instance, with the anticipation that more women would gradually take jobs and have their meals outside their homes, the importance of the kitchen areas and utilities inside the

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<sup>220</sup> František Jungmann, “Co očekají odborz od práce architekta,” *Architektura ČSR V 1* (1946), 16, quoted in Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*, 223.

<sup>221</sup> Musil, “The Sociological Approach.”

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

apartment was to be de-emphasized with regard to the future plans of dwellings.<sup>224</sup> With regard to the playing areas for children, this terrain was also understated justifying by the prediction that, as more children were to be enrolling in educational institutions, children would spend extended time after class inside their schools to prepare their homework or with their peers under the supervision of school staffs.<sup>225</sup> Moreover, Musil also talked of the future “Time-saving devices” and the wide availability of “partly-prepared foods” that would help free the members of the family from time-consuming domestic chores and food preparation time.<sup>226</sup> All these considerations were translated into the plans for the interior designs and the layouts of the dwellings built from 1963 onwards, with the stress on the minimalism of the public space as well as the interior space and its amenity, the same themes which were strongly criticised later on during the late socialism by the same group of academia within sociology, as well as in the artistic sphere (which will be discussed below). Clearly, the concerns about the quality of lives of the residents within the newly built housing estates were not ignored by the Czechoslovak state, but instead were well incorporated into the state’s discourse which showed a rising interest in the issue of the quality of *Sídliště* living environment. This is in accordance with Paulina Bren’s account of the Normalisation regime’s interest in promoting the notion of “quality of life”, instead of consumption, as the core benefit of the socialist lifestyle. The implementation of “quality-of-life” policies related to housing could be seen as a part of the strategy to depoliticise social conflict during the Normalisation period.

Worrying about residents’ regular weekend trips to the countryside, which they associated with a hostile *Sídliště* environment, the state politicians directly addressed the problems, taking the roles of social critics themselves.<sup>227</sup> The Party chairman directed architects in 1982 “to create a living environment conducive to happy family life (...) where people would feel at home.”<sup>228</sup> In 1985, a team of experts sanctioned by the state led by sociologist Musil published qualitative and quantitative research on 13 housing estates, studying the links of the living space inside housing estates and the social and psychological impact on the residents. In addition to a number of positives, the research team identified the

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 273-274.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> See Paulina Bren, “Weekend Getaways.”

<sup>228</sup> Maros Krivy, “Quality of Life or Life-in-Truth?: A Late-Socialist Critique of Housing Estates in Czechoslovakia,” *Re-Framing Identities* 3 (2017), 316.

following shortcomings of *Sídliště*; its monotony, incompleteness, lack of public services and civic amenities, mono-functionality (serving mainly as dormitories for sleeping in), lack of job opportunities, lack of variety of different age groups apart from young adult, the loss of privacy due to the structural quality of the prefabricated panels (thin walls that are not sound-proofed), etc. The research by Budaj in 1987 which studied the socio-psychological adaptations of residents in Petržalka was another example of the contemporary social critique of *Sídliště*. Budaj distinguished two categories of population who lived inside newly built prefabricated housing estates in Czechoslovakia; the first one did not adapt and wanted to leave and the other found their ways to adjust to the new environment.<sup>229</sup> Scientists and experts in the field of housing and urban planning ventilated critical notes around the theme of technocratic phase *Sídliště*, not excluding Musil himself who foregrounded the creation of these estates in the 1960s. After the end of state-socialism, Musil came to directly attack technocratic phase *Sídliště*, calling its architectural style and planning as “perversion”, blaming these estates as the result of the delay mechanism within socialist system itself which silenced critics and made modifications hard to materialise without delay.<sup>230</sup> Rather than ignoring the social critique, the academic researches and reports done by experts on the conditions of lives inside housing blocks were well received by the party apparatus. The Czechoslovak state was able to assimilate dissenting approaches in the realm of housing and quality of life and successfully divert them into its own political concern and rhetoric.

Against this background, the residents of *Sídliště* themselves were mostly silent in their critique, and instead, were reported to be satisfied with their living environment, the phenomenon which was explained by Martin Veselý as resulting from the process of cognitive dissonance which made the residents become in denial of any defect of their homes. The social critiques of *Sídliště*, instead of coming from below, mainly came from the intelligentsia and high-ranked planners, and therefore, had a clear top-down nature. After all, it had been their jobs from the very beginning to design policies and come up with practical solutions to all the concerns about housing, while ordinary citizens had no final say in what to be done within the state-socialist context. The hypocrisy from the side of the state apparatus who did not speak about the content of the Communist doctrine, but concentrated

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<sup>229</sup> Budaj, *Bratislava nahlas*.

<sup>230</sup> From Pavla Horská, Eduard Maur, Jiří Musil, Zrod Velkoměsta, *Urbanizace českých zemí a Evropa* (Praha: Paseka, 2002), 276-284, quoted and cited in Marijke Martin, Cor Wagenaar, “Building a New Community – A Comparison Between the Netherlands and Czechoslovakia,” *Re-Humanizing Architecture (Vol. 1)* (2017), 168-169.

on the language of “quality of life” while actually refusing to undergo serious reforms, led to most of the citizens giving up on any participation in decision-making processes. Instead of asking for the end of state socialism, on the contrary, the social critics proposed to improve and reform it by criticising the shortcomings of the existing *Sídlišťe*, addressing the psychological harm that the environment of *Sídlišťe* could negatively affect the residents. The social critique of *Sídlišťe* of the technocratic phase, therefore, repeated the rhetoric appeared within the notion of “Socialism with a human face” which was synonymous with the Normalisation kind of lifestyle within the post-1968 Czechoslovak society. The flourish of this type of critique and the state’s initiatives in reforms during the late 1980s coincided with the acceptance of the Soviet policy of glasnost and perestroika which became in full bloom from the year 1987 after the visit of Gorbachev in Prague. Nevertheless, despite of the apparent outward concerns on the quality of life of the citizens, the actual reactions to the social critique in the form of state policies did not have time to take shape and materialise when socialist system abruptly came in an end in 1989. Peter Lizon has commented on the socialist government’s low priority with regard to the actual improvement of housing conditions and the well-being of the residents:

“The authorities kept seemingly busy with the demand for more housing units. The impact of the living conditions on the psyche, work productivity, physical health, and so on, of the panel-system housing generations, was, unfortunately, low on the government’s list of priorities.”<sup>231</sup>

This brings us back to Žižek’s notion of the parallax gap mentioned in chapter 1, whereby the Outside flows into the Inside, destroying the boundary between the public discourse (the Outside) and the private discourse (the Inside), and thereby, unintentionally highlights the new boundary which has always been ignored, the gap between walls and floors where the electric wires are and where we flush excrement into. This dark gap between walls is, according to Žižek, where the horrible threats normally lurk from in horror films. In the context of the Party-state’s viewpoint, it is the gap where the political threats which have the potential of overthrowing the system located. The state apparatus relied on this space, and by ignoring it, they created the threats to themselves out of this space. The disappearance of social critique which seemed to have successfully absorbed into the

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<sup>231</sup> Peter Lizon, “East Central Europe: The Unhappy Heritage of Communist Mass Housing,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 50:2 (November 1996), 108.

discourse of the Party's stress on reforms to improve "quality of life" coincided with the rise of other types critiques of *Sídliště*. This interpose of the politics into the private sphere, or the Outside into the Inside, broke down the boundary between the public sphere and private sphere, but at the same time generated a new force within the new "third space" whereby the philosophical and artistic critiques flourished. These critiques, though not so subversive and not going under the radars of the state control, their implicit protesting gestures (often disguised in the political environment of normalisation era) were hard to decipher. They built a kind of public forum outside of the official channels through their refusal to engage in the discourses produced by the state. These critiques (which will be discussed in the rest of this chapter) articulated their claims in various forms within the political and cultural context of late socialist Czechoslovakia.

### 3.2 "Natural world" and "life-in-truth": Philosophical critique of *Sídliště*

"The problem has no longer resided in a political line or program: it is a problem of life itself."

*Václav Havel, The Power of the Powerless (1979), 40.*

The reinstatement of the orthodox wing of the regime in the post-1968 arguably gave grounds for the artistic critique to flourish, with the social critique, instead of being totally suppressed, channelled into the domain of artistic critique which then resulted in the unique fusion of thoughts that were then embraced by the dissidents.<sup>232</sup> Arguably, it was the Communist Party itself that first canalised Czechoslovak citizens into the realm of meaning with the depoliticising thrust of the decades coupled with the association of the popularised notion of the socialist quiet domestic life with the idea of meaningful socialist lifestyle that surpasses capitalist way of life. This state-supported notion of the retreat into the private sphere and the subsequent stagnation of the public sphere, with regard to Václav Havel's view, could only be dealt with by "following the individual into the private and reinvigorating that sphere."<sup>233</sup> Czechoslovak artistic critics of socialism like Havel largely reflected the "apolitical" stance of the first Czechoslovak president Tomas Garrigue Masaryk

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<sup>232</sup> Bren, "The Greengrocer and His TV".

<sup>233</sup> Daniel Brennan, "Considering the Public Private-Dichotomy: Hannah Arendt, Vaclav Havel and Victor Klemperer on the Importance of the Private," *Human Studies* 40:2 (2017), 260.

in his argument on a “non-political” politics based on everyday-life acts which work as the foundation for ideological coercion of behaviour. The non-political politics involves the indifference of citizens of the state expectations of their behaviours. These seemingly non-political behaviours outside the radars of the system within the blurred boundaries of the public and private space, paradoxically, produce a “non-political” political effect on their own. By redirecting discourse back to the individual and insisting on the language of natural individual rights, Havel led his followers away from the existing ideological state paradigm which also articulated its own rhetorical language of rights.

With regard to his direct criticism on *Sídlišťe*, Havel famously spoke of the housing estates as “undignified rabbit pens, slated for liquidation.”<sup>234</sup> In 1984, Havel mentioned of prisons, concentration camps, and housing estates in one breath, as if to place them in the same cluster of things that are in opposition to the natural world as a transcendental home.<sup>235</sup> In his essay *Politics and Conscience* (1984), Havel discussed the processes of anonymisation and depersonalisation of power as seen in a rational technology of politics which liberates reason from people’s experience and conscience.<sup>236</sup> He was concerned that the west, while focusing on the overt oppressive manifestations of power such as the purge of civic staffs or that of the work of StB (Czechoslovak State Security) that worked on operational and repressive activities, monitoring politically questionable individuals using hired spying agents and informants, would not perfectly understand the more extreme kind of “totalitarian power” existed within the Eastern bloc society. In this “totalitarian society”, it is the system that had an outpost in each individual who is invested and tangled in the webs of depersonalised bureaucracy. The only practical solution to this is not in the confrontational protest against the regime, but that it is the individual himself/herself that has to be “replenished” from the system if he or she wants to be genuinely free.<sup>237</sup> This reasoning can be found in many films that focus on the theme of late socialist *Sídlišťe* which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter. These messages, interestingly, are the very same messages the contemporary radical leftist Frankfurt School theorists addressed in their critical stance against late-industrial society in the West in the kind of existential struggle of each individual, but were silent in their attention to the situations within the Eastern Bloc.

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<sup>234</sup> Matt Reynolds, “Still Standing,” *Prague Post* (10 March 2005).

<sup>235</sup> Havel (1984), in Ševčík, “Postmodernismus v architecture,” 150–151, cited in Krivý, “Quality of Life,” 316.

<sup>236</sup> Václav Havel, *Politics and Conscience* (Stockholm: Charta 77 Foundation, 1986).

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

This very same language of freedom which one has to struggle to get by negating the imposed ideologies and the accompanied false consciousness is shown in Havel's articulation of his dissenting discourse.

Havel articulated his critical views in terms of life's in-authenticity in the environment of the *Sídliště* with the focus on meaning as the ground of their political struggle against the regime. This kind of meaning is different from that articulated by architectural critics and their historical turn in the search of meanings in the traditional architecture and urbanism (which will be discussed in the next section). However, these two types of criticism are interconnected in a way that the artistic critique explained and justified the architectural critique of *Sídliště* with philosophical insight. This connection is apparent when looking at Václav Havel's statement in 1984 regarding postmodernist architecture, which he saw as "a signal" that man became aware of the fact that "he cannot understand nor plan everything (...) that he is a part of a mysterious order – the natural world."<sup>238</sup> This concept of natural world (*prirozený svět*) was borrowed from Czech philosopher Jan Patočka who in turn was inspired by Edmund Husserl's concept of "life-world."<sup>239</sup> Patočka saw the meaning of life as intrinsic to the natural world. The techno-scientific rationalisation as the outgrowth of modernity, however, causes the destruction of this natural world as well as the meaning of life in an authentic form, threatening to imprison individual in the cage of coldly impersonal rationality.

Havel read the industrialised architecture of *Sídliště* as a part of techno-scientific rationalisation which caused the loss of the natural world through its pursuit of "a myth of objectivism."<sup>240</sup> Later after the Velvet Revolution, Havel directly said of Petržalka in Bratislava in 1990 in terms of the contamination of "moral environment":

"When I flew recently to Bratislava, I found some time during discussions to look out of the plane window. I saw the industrial complex of Slovnaft chemical factory and the giant Petržalka housing estate right behind it. The view was enough for me to understand that for decades our statesmen and political leaders did not look or did not want to look

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<sup>238</sup> Havel cited in Jiří Ševčík, *Postmodernismus v architektuře*, 151, cited in Krivý, "Quality of Life," 317.

<sup>239</sup> Jan Patočka, a Czech philosopher and university professor and the first speaker of the Charter 77 before the Communist power ended his life, who introduced the idea of the "solidarity of the shaken."; Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: North western University Press, 1970).

<sup>240</sup> Krivý, "Quality of Life," 317.

out of the windows of their planes. No study of statistics available to me would enable me to understand faster and better the situation in which we find ourselves."<sup>241</sup>

This speech of Havel reflects the dissidents' cynicism on the socialist system which was associated with the sense of falsehood and vanity, the antidote to life's authenticity. This type of critique used *Sídliště* not only as a tool to criticise late socialism's urban structure and the environmental by-products, but also at its teleological vision of history. Havel placed Petržalka side by side with his view on environmental contamination from a chemical factory, both of which were the situations that were so noticeable from the viewpoint of politicians (who could see the big picture, like from the bird's-eye view, through the comprehensive plans they got on their tables) yet at the same time the most disregarded issues. The speech demonstrates clearly how Havel used Petržalka as the site for which his attack on state-socialism was located. The technocratic phase housing estates can be seen, therefore, as one of the themes the dissidents addressed outwardly within their dissenting discourse.

### **3.3 Architectural critique and the historical turn in the late socialist critique of *Sídliště*"**

"It is far more likely that these visions were unrealistic from the very beginning, stemming from false assumptions and erroneous expectations or having simply missed the current demand. On the one hand, we could perceive their unfinished fragments or even sprouted ruins as monuments of our own incapability, but on the other hand, observing many of them after a while we have to admit that it is precisely their incompleteness which brings us much greater inspirational potential and material for reflection today than if they had been realized according to the original intention."

*Osamu Okamura, "Unfinished Structures as Creative Challenge," (2012)<sup>242</sup>*

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<sup>241</sup> Václav Havel, "New Year's Address to the Nation" (1990).

<sup>242</sup> Osamu Okamura, "Unfinished Structures as Creative Challenge – An Inspirational Guide to the Failed Ambitions of Central European Architecture," in Maria Topolčanská, "Fake Cities/ True Stories. Parallel Realities in Central European Urbanity Before and After 1990," *Visegrad Intercity Seminar in Architecture, Faculty of Architecture STU Bratislava* (2012).



“The building looks as if it does not follow the consistent plan. It is as if it tries to materialize two conflicting inconsistent architectures. (...) In what [type of] social, ideological tensions, and antagonism, does this parallax architecture materialize? (...) Most of the architects are doing honest jobs, one should not put the blame on them. (...) what is interesting in great architecture is how they register this tension, and how they, (...) in the utopian ways, (...) try to formulate some possible spaces of authentic freedom within this space. Often we tend to blame architects for evils which originate elsewhere.”

*Slavoj Žižek, “Parallax and Architecture, with Alan Saunders,”  
(1 November 2016)*

Much of the architectural criticism against *Sídliště* during the late socialism in Czechoslovakia came as a form of reactions against the succumbs of architectural details to the limits of prefabrication. Architects of the technocratic phase *Sídliště* themselves felt upset with how their own designs were compromised during the building process. Stanislav Talaš, the main architect of Petržalka, for example, criticised the finished stage of the housing estate in terms of its absence of “traditional details” and “human-scale” and asked for a rediscovery of classical principles.<sup>243</sup> This section will evaluate the inter-connectedness of these two elements that Talaš mentioned, the returning to traditional details and human-scale during the late socialism in Czechoslovakia in order to understand the nature of the architectural critique and its historical turn and accompanied it.

It was not until the late 1970s that large scale panel housing estates in Czechoslovakia were widely criticised by the local. Truly, the years coincided with the time that the construction of technocratic phase *Sídliště* came almost to the endpoint and the new residents had already moved in. Much of the criticism came from within the architectural sphere with the apparent tendency of Czechoslovak architecture to move beyond the theoretical heritage of functionalism and “high modernism.” This owes much to the intensified transnational exchange and the shifting geopolitical boundaries that helped diffuse postmodernist ideas, which became popular in the west since the 1960s, among academia European-wide. Postmodernism was reintroduced into Czechoslovak architectural debates in the late 1970s, functioning as a tool that brought back elements of Socialist Realism and integrated them

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<sup>243</sup> Krivý, “Quality of Life,” 80.

with the new quest for historicity and meaning.<sup>244</sup> It became common to discuss the need for “architectonisation” or the notion that architects should prioritise the architectural quality, character, and expression when it comes to the architectural design of a building. Krivý talks of the historical-phenomenological turn in architecture during the late socialist period from the late 1970s in Czechoslovakia which incorporated elements from two interconnected sources, postmodernism and neo-socialist realism as architectural and aesthetic phenomena.<sup>245</sup>

Neo-functionalism and the associated criticism of socialist realism of the 1950s itself were subjected to criticism by many architectural critics. Centred to their criticism was the critique of functionalist *Sídliště* and its discontinuity with history and memories.<sup>246</sup> Architectural historian Jiří Ševčík in 1978 talked of the contrast between the “placelessness of the new estate” and its inhabitants’ memories of the old city where they used to live in.<sup>247</sup> This is similar to what Gustav Janouch articulated in his work “Conversations With Kafka” (1961) reflecting Kafka’s similar view on the notion of “placelessness” in Prague New Town:

“The past of Prague consists not only in preserved built heritage, but foremost in the spirit of its inhabitants. Dark corners, mysterious lanes, blind windows, noisy pubs and obscure taverns live inside ourselves. We walk along broad streets of a new town, but our steps and looks are not sure. We tremble with fear inside, as if we walked through ancient, miserable alleys/ back lanes. Our hearts have not found clarity yet. The vicious old ghetto inside ourselves is more real than our new, hygienic environment. We walk in our own as if in a dream, that is we who are mere ghosts of the past.”<sup>248</sup>

To renew a sense of place among the residents of the new housing estates built in the technocratic phase, the late socialist critics of *Sídliště* in Czechoslovakia looked back into

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<sup>244</sup> Postmodernism in Czechoslovakia, and in other socialist countries, rejected the commercial element which it believed was incompatible with socialist ideology. This rejection of decorative and commercial 'kitsch' resembles Karel Teige's rejection of vulgar aspects of modernism in the west during the inter-war years, the similarity which could be studied further.

<sup>245</sup> Krivý, “Quality of Life,” 80.

<sup>246</sup> Postmodernism also influenced many designs of other types of buildings such as non-residential buildings and public buildings. However, in the circumstances of late socialist Czechoslovakia, it was primarily incorporated as one of the main components for the quest for the architectonization of *Sídliště*.

<sup>247</sup> Krivý, “Quality of Life,” 83.

<sup>248</sup> Franz Kafka, Janouch (1961), 96, quoted in Maier, *Urban Development of Prague*, 116.

the history and national identity to search for architectural and urban solutions. The yearning for the past was reflected in statements made by Slovak contemporary architectural historians such as Tomáš Štrauss and Matúš Dulla who both criticised the monotony of the housing estates of the technocratic phase. In 1978, Tomáš Štrauss referred to the creators of these estates as those “who have been infesting the country with concrete, with the rapacity of barbarians.”<sup>249</sup> He argued that this kind of functionalist architecture destroyed “valuable monuments of the past (...) and turning the once beautiful country into a desert concrete monoliths. (...) [destroying] the image of diverse (...) cities and (...) the distinctiveness that evolves throughout history.”<sup>250</sup> Matúš Dulla asked for the revival of the concept of architectural and historical continuity which had been ignored during the technocratic phase.<sup>251</sup> The desire to imbue architecture with historical meanings was, therefore, a reaction against the perceived meaninglessness of the architectural industrialization as a result of the bureaucratic reason more than a reaction against the idea and style of modernism itself. This is one element that distinguishes Czechoslovak critique of modernist architecture from the western counterpart. Although this desire to reconnect architecture with historicity reflects the broad postmodernist movement, in the case of Czechoslovakia, the yearning for the historical past in the realm of architecture is more prominent and unique, with architectural critics usually articulating their claims with the question of the absence of “national character” within the functionalist *Sídliště* and proposing “the return to what they (already) have at home.”<sup>252</sup> This reference to national and traditional architecture had been condemned by Khrushchev about two decades earlier as “pseudo-references” that did not reflect “the essential needs of the people.”<sup>253</sup> The question arose is to what extent late socialist Czechoslovak architects went on in their quest of bringing back architectural traditions.

The answer is that the yearning for the past and the return of “national character” in Czechoslovakia was not translated into an explicit application of adorned facades of the outer wall resembling the neo-classical architecture with pieces of sculpture on the windowsills like what happened in the West during the high-time of Postmodernist age in the 1970s and 1980s. Rather, the solutions were much more modest, being translated into two types. The first one is the surficial renovations of the existing *Sídliště*. This could be observed within

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<sup>249</sup> Krivý, “Quality of Life,” 78.

<sup>250</sup> “UCA: the Union of Czech Architects - annual meeting,” (1982) cited in *Ibid.*,” 78-79.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>253</sup> Khrushchev, “Industrialised Building Speech.”

the application of graphic ornamentation with implicit references to folk facades, the installation of sculptures (mostly ideologically neutral and surrealistic), the addition of fountains to charge the housing estates with meaning and beauty, the application of “traditional earthy colours” such as earthy brown, brick red, and clay yellow onto the blind walls of existing panel housing estates (intended also to increase ease of orientation and to give individual block a specific visual identity), and the design of extensional entrance canopies which were expected to add a sense of relationship with history.<sup>254</sup> Although all these strategies were only superficial additions, they reflect the desire for meanings during the late socialist time, the meanings which were created by borrowing from what could be found in the past and superimpose them onto the perceived meaninglessness characters of functionalist *Sídliště*.

The second type of solution was the plans for the future estates that would bring back traditional urban structural style which could be seen in the proposal for the revival of urban block that resembles the domestic legacy of the nineteenth century. Against the linear open space of the functionalist housing estates, the notions of boundedness and centrality was brought back in the form of perimeter blocks and streets with references to the social implications which could be observed in neoclassical housing architecture such as those exist in Vinohrady. Historian Jiří Ševčík borrowed from Kevin Lynch’s and Christian Norberg-Schulz’s notion of existential space, suggesting in the early 1980s how the perimeter block and the lively pedestrian street where a semi-public space is formed could help foster orientation and social interactions that, arguably, were hard to be found in the spatially disorienting technocratic phase *Sídliště*.<sup>255</sup> Though these ideas were seldom realised in reality during the late socialism (except for the surface colour scheme and the addition of art statues which could be done with relative ease), Krivý sees this architectural return to the traditional urban and architectural plans as an indication of Czechoslovak postmodern turn in urbanism and architecture, suggesting how the functionalist type of housing estates, particular those built during the technocratic phase, could be viewed as “a historical aberration,” with the late socialist architectural critique of *Sídliště* being simply an attempt

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<sup>254</sup> (Krivý, “Quality of Life,” 84, 81.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

at continuing of what existed since the late nineteenth century and during the 1950s in the form of socialist realism.<sup>256</sup>

This turn to a dialectical conception of historicity is arguably a unique Czechoslovak phenomenon during the late socialist time. Crucially, during the international conference “Socialist Realism Reassessed: Architecture of the Years 1949-1956” held in Poland in 1985, the notion of historicity and the need to bring back architectural traditions were stressed pronouncedly by a Czechoslovak delegate while other delegates in the Soviet bloc concerned more on the stylistic elements of socialist realist architecture detached from history.<sup>257</sup> The Czechoslovak delegate Sedláková nostalgically spoke against the disappearance of a “sense of place” and a “sense of scale for human being” that existed in socialist realist architecture in Czechoslovakia thirty years earlier when “houses made space” and not the other way round. In this way, the Czechoslovak postmodernist turn in architecture had a uniquely close connection with the critique of neo-functionalism while at the same time appeared to concentrate more than what appeared within the critique of modernist-functionalist architecture in other countries, on the notion of historical meaning and continuity. This is what differentiate the Czechoslovak architectural critique from that of its international counterparts, with the highlight on their common fight against the subjugation of *Sídliště* architecture to the sense of meaninglessness. Their solution was to attempt to architecturally form (and re-form) the living space and fill it with meanings borrowed from national traditions. Neo-functionalist *Sídliště* of the technocratic phase was usually interpreted by these architectural critics as a stylistic anomaly that broke down the historical continuity in the architecture of housing in Czechoslovakia.

Importantly, when reading the statements from these architectural critics, one should also take into account the pressure between architects and engineering possibility at the time. One can always see a continual struggle between engineering technology and architecture in the history of panel building. This is because modern technology and modernist architecture are intrinsically connected, with industrial and technological developments and architects’ decisions on the designs and aesthetics of buildings often coincide. However, for the Czechoslovak late socialist housing estates, this struggle between architects and the construction company and the engineers was particularly prominent. Ivo Oberstein, the main

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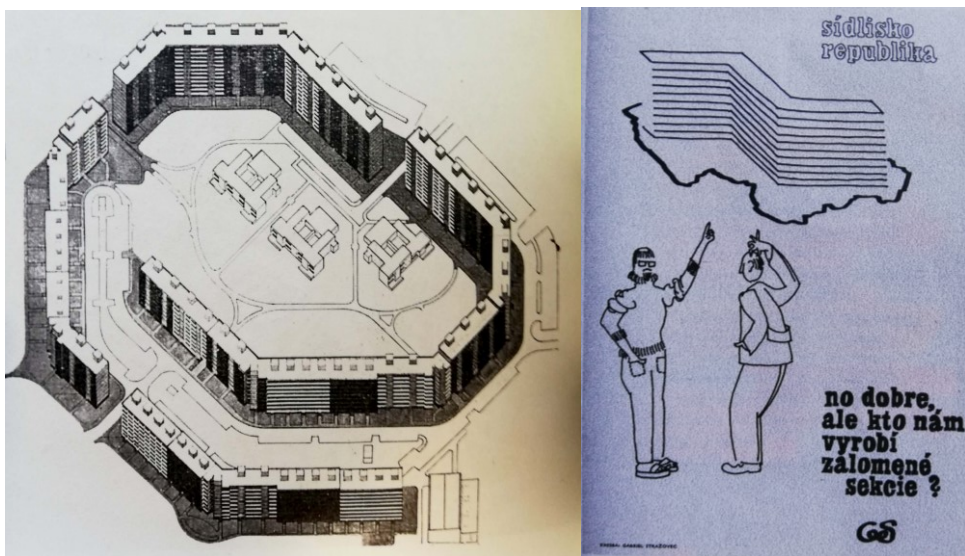
<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 80.

architect of “Jihozápadní Město” complained about the lack of independence the architects faced in their own projects:

“Our original conception from the end of the Sixties was much freer. It would have been a pleasant residential town with small, five storey blocks and single-family houses, but the authorities had a different conceptual opinion and designed nine blocks forming a kind of harsh iceberg. I don’t like to remember my discussions with them.”<sup>258</sup>

In the design of “Jihozápadní Město,” bent corner section was proposed by Oberstein with the apartment sections in enclosed blocks turning towards each other at angles of 135 degrees. Due to the limits of engineering practice at the time, the finished result of the estate took a much-simplified form of boring 90 degrees angle. The problematic aspect is demonstrated in the contemporary satirical cartoon in 1980, showing an example of the struggle between engineering practice and architectural creativity (Figure 9).



**Figure 9:** (Left) Original plan of Jihozápadní Město made in 1979 (Architektura ČSR XLI, 1982, 6); (Right) “Republic of Housing Estate: All right, but who is going to build these bent sections?” (Architektura ČSR XXXIX, 1980, 5)

By taking into consideration this limit, architects came into the realisation that they had to take into consideration the functionalist doctrines and engineering possibility when designing housing estates if they wanted their projects to actually be realised as they planned.

<sup>258</sup> From an interview with Ivo Oberstein at [www.earch.cz/cs/rozhovor-s-ivo-obersteinem](http://www.earch.cz/cs/rozhovor-s-ivo-obersteinem), published 30 April 2007, cited and quoted in the endnote of Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*, 192.

In most cases, the expectations and visions of architects did not align with the actual executions, especially when their plans were compromised due to the limits of economic possibility and standardisation. One main architect of Prague's "Nový Barrandov" which started its construction process from 1981 gave his opinion:

"It's about making the project one that can be realised. Not to make any exaggerations, not to be overly optimistic. Usually, the result of this is a major disappointment. (...) But it doesn't mean to give up, or even to think that I'm rewriting the laws or rethinking the 'panel block'."<sup>259</sup>

The architects of Nový Barrandov seemed to have reconciled themselves to the uniform appearance of *Sídliště* which was enforced by the limits of the economy and of panel technologies. The architectural historian Radka Valterevá commented on how architects during the late socialist era could add some creative elements with "a good idea and with clever wit" onto the architecture of *Sídliště* without being intervened by the state or construction company. If ordinary panels were used and put together in the same old ways, "no one will mind", Valterevá commented. Creativeness was allowed to a certain extent if ordinary prefabricated panels were put together in an identical way like it had always been.<sup>260</sup> Reconciling with the reality they faced, architects of the housing estates built during the last phase of socialism, particularly during the 1980s, did what they can do in low-profile ways, within the available space provided by the state and by engineering and economic limits, to make positive changes to the architecture of late socialist *Sídliště*, as Zdeněk Hölzel, the main architect of Prague's Nový Barrandov stated:

"Our society lacks the mechanism that would support the realisation of good architecture or a more humane form of housing estates. Instead, we have mechanisms that prevent this. When we want to do something in Barrandov that would raise the usual standard, we have to do it somehow secretly, so that the planners don't turn it down immediately. It's essentially subversive activity, which is why we don't even want any

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<sup>259</sup> See Myslivečková, "Domy odněkud," *Českolovenský architekt* XXXII 15:4 (1986), 4, cited and quoted in Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*.

<sup>260</sup> "Veselý hrad barradovský," *Mladá Fronta Dnes. Pražské vzdání III*, "Vikend," 262 (7 November 1992), 7, cited and quoted in Skřivánková, *The Paneláks*, 213.

premature publicity. As long as little was known about Barrandov, we had fewer problems than we do now.”<sup>261</sup>

With same old ways of putting panel blocks together to form identical building blocks, architects and planners were able to add some elements that were not related to the panel technologies such as the more socialised inner-street network between housing blocks and the semi-public garden frontages with tiny fences and inner courtyards. A modest application of traditional colours to reflect architectural traditions was another way architects could exert their independence in their own projects. For instance, in Nový Barrandov, the colour scheme with alternate white, brown, and ochre colours was creatively added to the facade of one Panelák block without being objected by the construction company (Figure 10). Valterevá saw this part of the estate as uniquely different as it “is not dressed up exactly like those around it, instead it has a striped garment, one floor in ‘natural’ concrete and the next in a terracotta tint.”<sup>262</sup>



**Figure 10:** (Left) “The happy castle of Barrandov” in 1992 (Photo by Pavel Štecha); (Right): Ivo Oberstein’s Jihozápadní Město (1987)<sup>263</sup>

Not only how the architectural critics of technocratic phase *Sídliště* in Czechoslovakia tended to stress on the national characters and historical continuity in their

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<sup>261</sup> “Zdeněk Hölzel, Architektonická konfrontace,” *Architektura ČSR XLVII* 1 (1988), 86, in *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> “Mladá Fronta Dnes, Víkend,” *Pražské vzdání III* 262, 7 November 1992, quoted in *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>263</sup> Pavel Štecha (1992), in *Ibid.*



newly proposed projects when making their proposals to the state, they also reflected how they had to reconcile to a kind of “real socialism” in the realm of architecture, doing what was realistically feasible given the limits imposed on them, even if it did not confirm their visions. As could be read from the statements by the architects who were active during the late socialism, it could be generally concluded that the architectural compromises seemed to be shown at the surface levels with “national character” rhetoric being widely used. Can this stress on “historicity” and “national character” in the architecture of housing estates among the late socialist architectural critics be, to a certain extent, viewed as a part of national historical nostalgia, or of an existing specific Czechoslovak national road to socialism rhetoric? Could it be viewed as a strategy to fight against the political and cultural isolation and containment in the region by defining its own national identity through “its own” culture and history, or is it simply about the tendency of dissidents to articulate their dissent under the guise of “national character” rhetoric? These are some questions remain for future research.

As Žižek argues, “often we tend to blame architects for evils which originate elsewhere,” it could be true in this context of the architectural product of the state-socialism.<sup>264</sup> Maria Topolčanská, a Slovak scholar and architect, has made her sympathetic explanation of the condition the young architects in the 1970s had to face, claiming how the “errors” incurred by the work of these architects (particularly in Bratislava) “are difficult to grasp in terms of success and failure by today’s standards.”<sup>265</sup> She argues that the architects of later much condemned project like Petržalka were “forced” by the state and the innate flaws within the socialist system (such as the construction industry product which was not subject to free-market competition, and “absurd” censorship of building materials available). In such “oppressive conditions”, Topolčanská contends that the architects, instead of designing their projects “for success,” they were instead condemned to design “against failure.”<sup>266</sup> With limited space for practicing and testing out their (modernist) theories in reality, immediately after they graduated, these architects went directly into state-organised

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<sup>264</sup> Žižek, “Parallax and Architecture, with Alan Saunders.”

<sup>265</sup> Maria Topolčanská, “Designing Against Failure. On the success of the late-modern architects of the 1960s and 70s in Bratislava,” *Wonderland Magazine, Issue “Making Mistakes”* 2 (2007), 36-37.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

architectural and building firms (such as Stravoprojekt). Topolčanská continues to plead for sympathy for these young architects who were active in the 1970s as followed:

“The architect after all was an employee of the state itself, and yet at the same time had to supply his ideas and concepts to that state- or rather, to fellow state employees, his position was more than usually disadvantaged and dependent. (...) Responsibility for failure and credit for success were portioned out anonymously among the dozens of uncreative staffs who made up the colossal apparatuses of the state project offices and studios. (...) In those times, the only possible way for an architect to express his or her creativity in private (and self-initiated) commission projects was to build a single family house, for oneself or for someone else.”<sup>267</sup>

All in all, to a certain degree, we can see the architectural critique of *Sídliště* as a part of the dissident movement in the sense articulated by Ines Weizman.<sup>268</sup> Although architecture is “the least likely of practices to articulate a dissident position”, it still has “the potential to serve as the medium for articulating ideas of resistance critique, reform or evasion.”<sup>269</sup> As the architectural designs and plans and the engineering practice of construction of housing estates had to be conducted in the long-term, architects and planners implicitly protested through a high degree of flexibility and self-discipline, adapting under changing economic and political conditions. Although architects and planners seemed to have resigned themselves to the fact that they could not completely “rethink the panel block” in their time, this does not mean that they would “give up” because there existed a space for a kind of “subversive activity” to materialize in the additions and alterations of specific details that were actually feasible to be implemented. Within this limited space, a special type of housing architecture emerged in the same sense as what Žižek terms as the kind that seems as if “it tries to materialize two conflicting inconsistent architectures,” which in the context of late socialist Czechoslovakia means that of subversive acts of adding creative elements, and that of strict functionalist architecture limited by panel block technology. The tensions between the reality of the practice of constructing housing estates and the designs by architects can also be seen in the films which will be analysed in the last section of this chapter. With these tensions, it seems as if the technocratic phase housing estates became

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Weizman, *Architecture and the Paradox of Dissidence*.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., kindle location 462.

the site for different types of actors to express “a spontaneous critique of the ruling ideology” as Žižek comments.<sup>270</sup>

### 3.4 Art as critique: *Paneláky* viewed by painters

Late socialist Czechoslovakia not only produced a kind of housing architecture which expressed its existential struggle against the system of standardisation and economic limits, but also artworks in the forms of painting and graphic satire which mirrored conditions in the contemporary society while at the same time existed as a critique of it. Many artworks created during the late socialist time appear to express the creators’ subjective reactions to the environment around them. This section focuses on the contemporary artworks produced during the late socialist time, particularly those with the theme of *Paneláky* or lives inside *Sídliště*, as to demonstrate how artists at the time interacted with the environment around them, and to see whether their artworks could be read as an artistic critique of *Sídliště*, and if so, in which nature this critique was articulated.

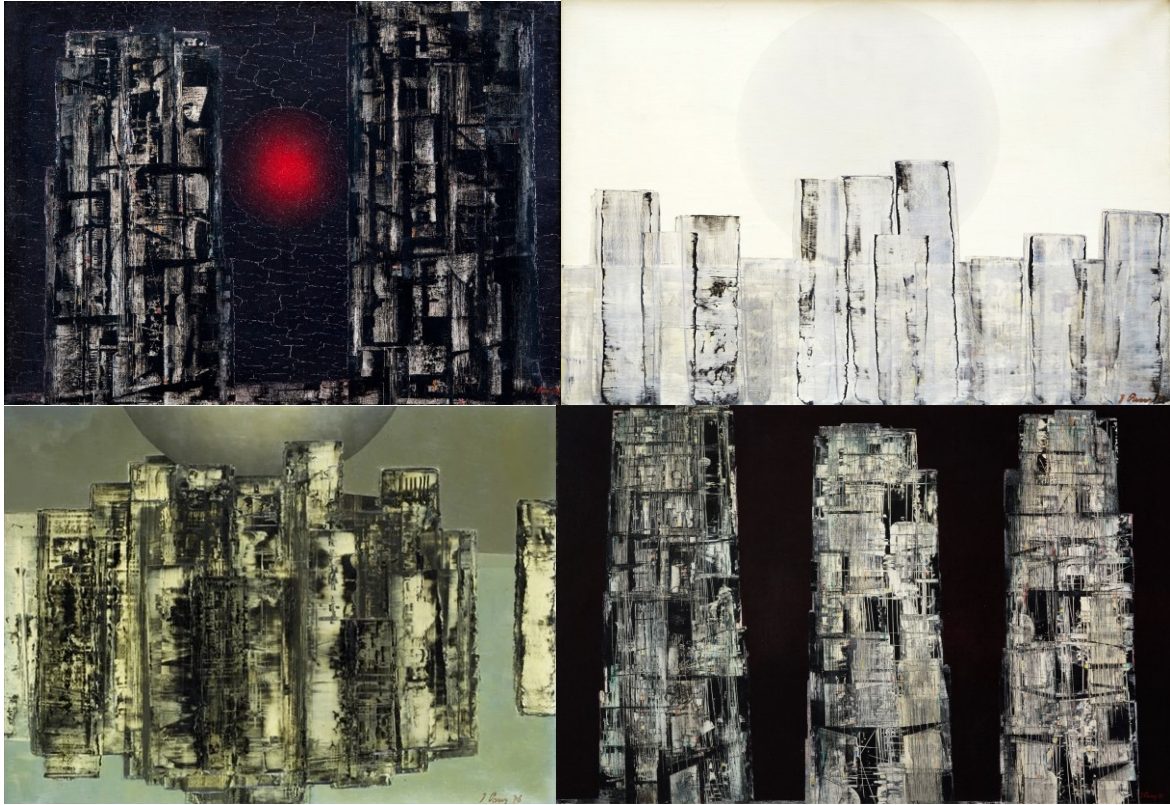
Coinciding with other types of critique against *Sídliště*, during the 1970s, Czechoslovak art began to revive from the shock of normalisation and reached a new phase in which art historians later term as the “grey zone,” the term which denotes the way artists during the late socialism operated underneath the official radars in an alternative zone of public presentation.<sup>271</sup> Not that the term has been coined due to this reasoning, it is also because many of the artworks produced during this phase have the characteristic of being “in grey,” with the messages that convey the feeling of “dirtiness” and grim nature of the colour grey, the same colour of that of naked concrete blocks that began to pop up around the suburbs of big cities.<sup>272</sup> One contemporary Czech artist who produced artworks in this theme was Jaroslav Paur (1918-1987) who depicted in many of his works the symmetry of imaginary towns in dark/grey tone (Figure 11). In the last decade of state-socialism, this generation of artists like Paur based their works on the theme of modernism formed by the experience of totalitarianism, though with individual technique and style.

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<sup>270</sup> Žižek, “Parallax and Architecture”.

<sup>271</sup> The term was first coined in 1988 in the samizdat magazine “Historical Studies.” See Lucie Ševčíková, Eva Žáková (eds.), “Czech Contemporary Art Guide,” *The Arts and Theatre Institute: The Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic* (2012), 23-24.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

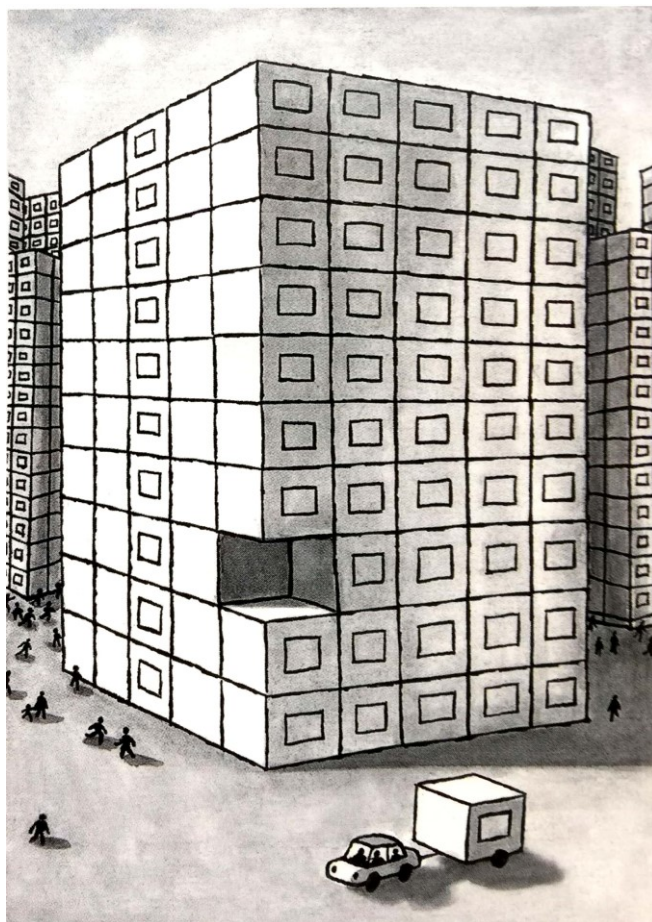


**Figure 11:** Jaroslav Paur and his collection of “Město” (1972-1977)<sup>273</sup>

Figure 12 shows a cartoon illustration drawn by Slovak artist from Bratislava Fero Jablonovský (1956-) published in 1979. This satirical cartoon depicts an image of a panelák which comprises of tiny cubical blocks of flats, a typical style of housing blocks built during the technocratic phase in the 1970s. In the figure, one block of flat is taken away by a family and being dragged by a car, leaving the housing block uncompleted with one piece of cubic block missing. Jablonovský reflects in this cartoon illustration the general wish of the residents who live inside these flats to escape away from the Panelák block that they live in (probably into the countryside) with their whole family and also their private lives (which locate within the tiny cube that they are dragging with their car). This could be read as a critique and a reflection of the “normalised” lives of the people in the late socialist time who could not care less about the lives inside the suburb district, or the housing block where they and their neighbours live. What the residents want is to escape as a family unit somewhere else, using a block of their flat rather as a mobile container. This demonstrates how the notion

<sup>273</sup> Jaroslav Paur, “Architektura v prostoru” (1973), “Město” (1972), “Město” (1978), “ Tři domy, tři města” (1977),” Retrieved from: [www.mutualart.com/Artwork/City/C51E529239CE5EFA](http://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/City/C51E529239CE5EFA); [www.mutualart.com/Artwork/City/D14E0BB79988742F](http://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/City/D14E0BB79988742F) [sophisticagallery.cz/dila/tri-domy-tri-mesta](http://sophisticagallery.cz/dila/tri-domy-tri-mesta). Accessed 24 July 2019.

of “the retreat into the private sphere” was mirrored in this satirical cartoon early in the late 1970s.



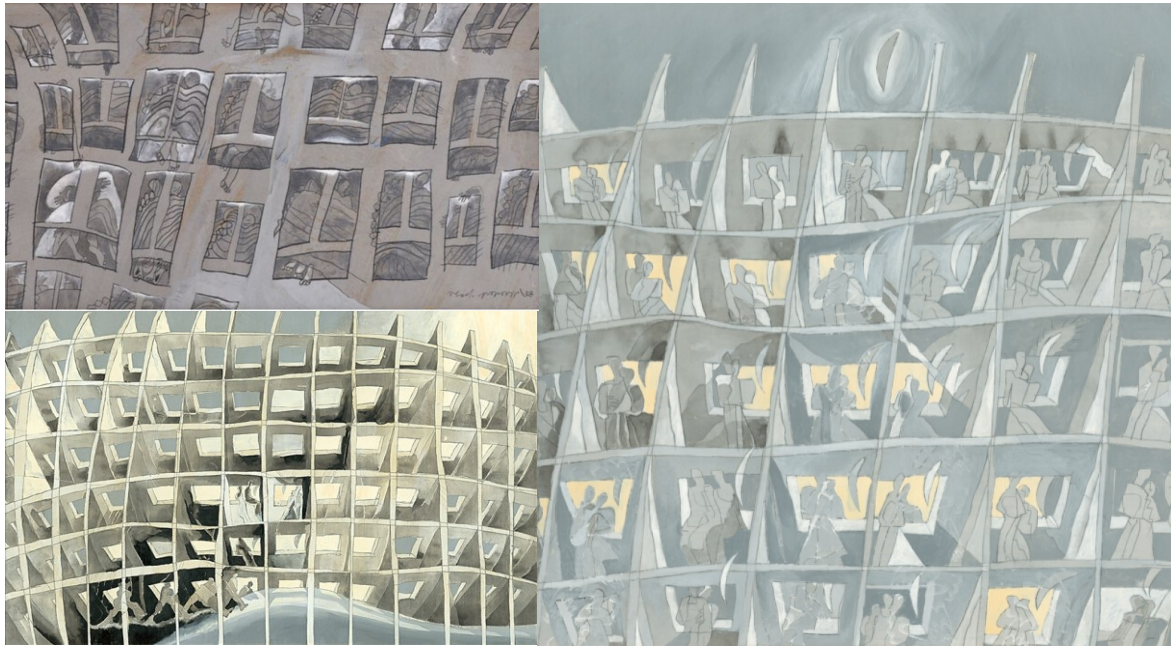
**Figure 12:** A cartoon illustration by Fero Jablonovský (1979)<sup>274</sup>

Another Slovak artist who created many paintings during the 1980s with the theme of Paneláky is Vladimír Popovič (1939-) who lived and worked in Bratislava during the late socialism. His paintings show ambiguous messages, mostly uncritical, though could be read in the opposite way depending on individual’s interpretations. Figure 13 shows three of his paintings which depict housing cells inside a Panelák with each cell having its own view to the sky. The painting on the right is similar to the one on the lower left, yet with an addition of the moon rising in the background and with each flat (this time with a couple inside each cell) having its own moon, as if to reflect how each pair of couple in each flat possesses the moon as their own, not sharing the same moon with others in the same housing block. The

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<sup>274</sup> Lucie Skřivánková, Rostislav Švácha, Martina Koukalová, and Eva Novotná, *Paneláci: 2 : Historie Sídlišť V Českých Zemích 1945-1989* (Praha: Uměleckoprůmyslové museum v Praze, 2017), back cover.

drawing could be read as reflecting the private lives of the residents inside their own flats, separated from the others, yet sharing one similar element, the moon, which in itself could be read as an allegory to any thing according to subjective interpretations.



**Figure 13:** Paintings by Vladimír Popovič (1986-1987)<sup>275</sup>

Another contemporary artist who produced his artworks with Paneláky theme is Michael Rittstein (1949-) who based in Prague during late socialist time. He created a couple of abstract surrealist paintings during the 1970s and 1980s with the depictions of blocks of flats as well as people's lives within them (in unrealistic forms). His paintings (Figure 14) show strong emotions in reaction to the environment of apartment lives with blocks of Paneláky or grey concrete walls appearing as part of his artworks. This type of paintings is part of an international style which had been popular since the early twentieth century but reappeared with great strength in the 1960s and 1970s against the climate of the Cold War and the space age. In his works as shown below, Rittstein, as one of the post-war surrealist painters, stressed on his subconscious, depicting lives inside housing blocks according to his

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<sup>275</sup> Vladimír Popovič, "Betónová sonáta" and "Betónová sonáta s mesiacom" (1986-1987), Retrieved from [www.webumenia.sk/dielo/SVK:SNG.O\\_6465](http://www.webumenia.sk/dielo/SVK:SNG.O_6465); [www.webumenia.sk/en/dielo/SVK:VSG.O\\_2847](http://www.webumenia.sk/en/dielo/SVK:VSG.O_2847), Accessed 22 July 2019.

own fantasy interpretations. The works appear provocative with the uses of colours and stories inside them which can be subjectively interpreted. Though being surrealist, his paintings reflect a combination of both realism and imagination. Many of his works depict cubical shapes of Paneláky which look realistic, yet the (human) lives inside them appear surrealistic, mostly acting with discourteous emotions or appearing to be with the intention of harming the others. These paintings demonstrated how a Czech artist reacted to the environment around him in Prague during the decades when a large number of Czechoslovak citizens encountered a new kind of lifestyle after they moved into the technocratic phase Sídliště.



**Figure 14:** Paintings by Michael Rittstein in the 1970s and the 1980s<sup>276</sup>

<sup>276</sup> (1, 4, 5), Retrieved from: [obrazyvaukci.cz/polozka/ota-janecek-old-hamera-cechova-al-moravec-fero-kudlac-aj\\_soubor-16-ti-grafickyh-listu-prevazne-70-a-80-leta-20-stol-28475](http://obrazyvaukci.cz/polozka/ota-janecek-old-hamera-cechova-al-moravec-fero-kudlac-aj_soubor-16-ti-grafickyh-listu-prevazne-70-a-80-leta-20-stol-28475); (2), Retrieved from:

These artworks demonstrate different ways contemporary artists interacted with their physical and social environments and societal atmospheres during the late socialism. These artists communicated in their own ways to the viewers, but with the same theme of Paneláky and lives inside them.

### 3.5 Czechoslovak *Sídliště* on screen

“I’m more and more convinced that if you want to get a direct grasp of where we stand ideologically, it’s in the movies. There you get today’s ideology in a clearer, more distilled form than in reality itself.”

*Slavoj Žižek, “On social unrest, Fall of Communism, and Milos Forman Films” (2011)*<sup>277</sup>

Cinema is never disconnected from the society that produces it. Films usually absorb impulses that are present in the broader cultural and political milieu at the time they are produced. Filmed during the time of political and cultural suppression, with the Communist regime rationalising their actions by describing the purges as “consolidation” or “a return to normality” era, *Panelstory* (1979), *A Heartfelt Greeting From Earth* (1982), and *My Sweet Little Village* (1985) are part of a much wider trend of Czechoslovak cinema during the Normalisation period that, ironically, do not reflect “consolidated” nor “normal” features, but instead celebrate chaos and the loss of spatial reference.<sup>278</sup> During this Normalisation era when “ideologically questionable” directors, particularly those who were active during the high-time of Czech New Wave in the 1960s, were purged or forced to give up bold stylistic experimentation with direct critical messages, some prominent directors could continue to demonstrate their personal integrity in their works. *Panelstory*, *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*, and *My Sweet Little Village* boldly absorb the symbolism and atmosphere of Normalisation era and use it to implicitly criticize the very nature of Normalisation itself. It seems that it was the Normalisation culture and its constraints that gave shape to the

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satanpekelnik.rajce.idnes.cz/Michael\_Rittstein/#PC110017.JPG; (3), Retrieved from: [www.idnes.cz/kultura/vytvarne-umeni/v-ramci-olomoucke-retrospektivy-povede-michael-rittstein-workshop.A090304\\_125022\\_vytvarneum\\_ob/foto/OB29848f\\_michael\\_rittstein\\_001.jpg](http://www.idnes.cz/kultura/vytvarne-umeni/v-ramci-olomoucke-retrospektivy-povede-michael-rittstein-workshop.A090304_125022_vytvarneum_ob/foto/OB29848f_michael_rittstein_001.jpg), Accessed 22 July 2019.

<sup>277</sup> Petr Dudek, Jan Richter, Slovoj Žižek, “Slovenian Philosopher Slavoj Žižek on social unrest, Fall of Communism, and Milos Forman Films,” *Radio Praha* (28 November 2011), retrieved from [www.radio.cz/en/section/one-on-one/slovenian-philosopher-slavoj-zizek-on-social-unrest-fall-of-Communism-and-milos-forman-films](http://www.radio.cz/en/section/one-on-one/slovenian-philosopher-slavoj-zizek-on-social-unrest-fall-of-Communism-and-milos-forman-films), Accessed: 10 July 2019.

<sup>278</sup> Hanáková, “The Films We are Are Ashamed of.”



cinematic style, direction, and purpose of these films. The latter would not have existed without the first.

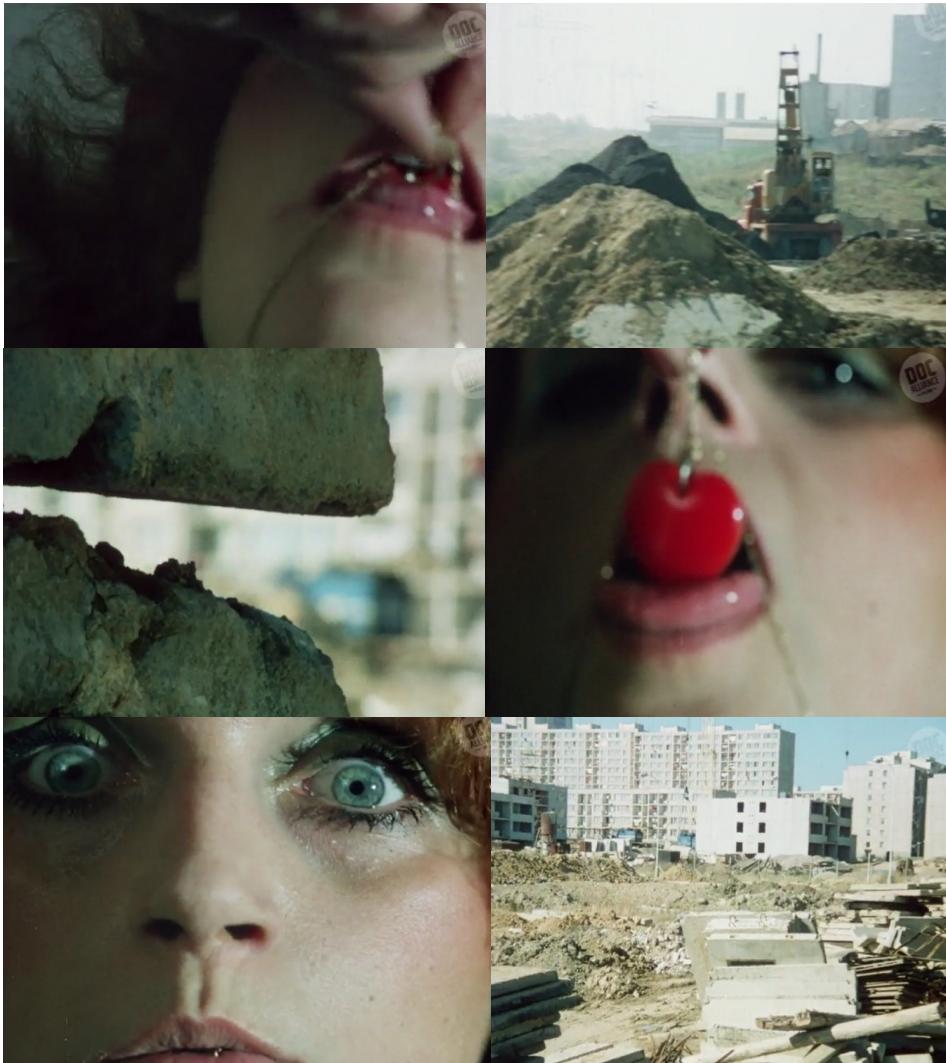
*Panelstory* (*Panelstory: aneb Jak se rodí Sídliště*) directed by famous Czech director Věra Chytilová is chosen for a discussion here mainly due to its centrality on the theme of *Sídliště* during late socialism in Czechoslovakia, which is also the trope of the thesis. Living environment in a setting of the new kind of architecture and urban structure during the 1970s is portrayed, with the main setting of the film being the real unfinished housing project of Prague's Jižní Město as it actually was like in the late 1970s. Peter Hames considers *Panelstory* to be one of the most critical Czech films of the Normalisation era.<sup>279</sup> As an intellectual author and a student of architecture before changing her career path to cinematography, Chytilová demonstrated in her works the hints of scholastic stints in the fields of philosophy and architecture. Chytilová made a claim in her interview that her film was “not a critical reaction to the regime; it’s more actually a view of human moral behaviour,” demonstrating how she was a part of the artistic (philosophical) critique movement that chose to address, and therefore indirectly criticised, the conditions of the late socialism and the social implications of town-planning failure in a roundabout way.<sup>280</sup> The sexual immoral behaviours of characters in *Panelstory* are put in sequential shots side by side with that of the housing estates under construction with piles of broken concrete and rubbish debris (Figure 15). A boy who does not have anybody to play with mirrors the destructive environment around him, picking up a truck toy from a trashcan only to throw it on the street to be crushed by a road roller (Figure 16). These scenes are highly symbolical,

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<sup>279</sup> Peter Hames, “Czechoslovakia: After the Spring,” in Peter Hames, *Post New Wave Cinema in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (Indiana and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 126; Peter Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave* (London: Wallflower, 2005), 254.

<sup>280</sup> “Q&A session after the screening of *Panelstory* screened at the Riverside Studios (London, 19 April 2001), cited and quoted in Andrew James Horton, “Against destruction - Vera Chytilova's *Panelstory* (Prefab Story), *Kinoeye: New Perspective on European Film* 2:8 (29 April 2002), 7, Retrieved from: [www.kinoeye.org/02/08/horton08.php](http://www.kinoeye.org/02/08/horton08.php), Accessed: 10 June 2019.

reflecting Chytilová's clever uses of allegories that compares images of acts of creation with acts of destruction.



**Figure 15:** Sexual promiscuity (Pro-creation) and housing construction (*Panelstory*)

The poor quality of the estate signifies both social decay and crisis of morality, and the other way round. In many ways, *Panelstory* can be viewed as a film about “destruction” that compares the “construction” scenes with the moral decay, and thus making the construction progress itself look more like something that signifies destruction. Chytilová herself commented in one of her interviews about her intention of directing the film *Panelstory*:

“I intended the film to be a protest against destruction. (...) in the philosophical and existential sense. (...) Destruction is going on in our lives and especially in our relationships. So, we wanted to use film

language to show this. (...) What I wanted to say was that man creates something with one breath and with the second breath destroys it. I wanted the audience to be aware of how the behaviour of man is contradictory.”<sup>281</sup>

The finished product of the film itself, however, is apparently at odds with the tenets of Socialism which led to the film being banned in Czechoslovakia shortly after its release in 1979 and was not allowed to be promoted internationally (except in Italy in 1980 where it got the gold medal from a film festival. Chytilová illegally transported it in the boot of her car). The ban was not lifted until the end of the Communist regime in 1989 though the film could be released for a limited time in limited regions.<sup>282</sup>



**Figure 16:** Construction vs. Destruction (*Panelstory*)

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<sup>281</sup> “Q&A session after the screening of *Panelstory* screened at the Riverside Studios,” quoted and cited in Horton, “Against destruction”.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

*Panelstory* is, however, not the first film in post-war Czechoslovakia that uses a site of *Sídliště* as the main film location. Earlier in 1963, Václav Táborský's black-and-white silent documentary *Mud-covered City (Zablácené město)* had already dealt with the theme of the newly moved in residents of "Sídliště Malešice" in the Eastern part of Prague, situating right next to "Sídliště Solidarity" which is the first true Czechoslovak housing estate of the post-war era. After *Panelstory*, two more films which also play with the similar theme of *Sídliště* are Oldřich Lipský's *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth* (1982) and Jiří Menzel's *My Sweet Little Village* (1985), the first also set in Jižní Město and the area around Háje metro station (previously known as Kosmonaut, Opatov, then Družby), and the latter in Nový Barrandov in the South-western part of Prague (though not the main film location, which was set in a tiny village in the countryside where main story-lines develop).



**Figure 17:** *Zablácené město* in 1963 (*Mud-covered City*)

Both *Panelstory* and *Mud-covered city* appear to play with the spaces of the housing estates under construction process, depicting the residents moving into new apartments while builders are at work on the construction sites. Both offer the viewers with a vision of the new

kind of living environment inside the newly built estates whereby the residents found themselves in the unique situation where the boundaries between their living space and the construction sites were unclear. The first generation of the inhabitants of Malešice and Jižní město lived among the construction teams with construction cranes, excavators, trucks, and sand piling up alongside construction debris and un-assembled pre-cast concrete walls scattered around all over the construction sites, the same space which also functioned as public space where the residents spent their free time relaxing and socializing. The new residents lived inside the unfinished estates, observing the unending construction process of their homes while at the same time observing themselves and their neighbours adjusting to the new lifestyles that the estate had to offer. These two films mirror these same images. However, the directors' messages to the audience are clearly different. *Mud-Covered City* seems to portray the society inside the housing estate of the early 1960s as intact, a socialist paradise in progress. *Panelstory*, on the other hand, argues for the bleak reality of the late 1970s, a late socialist social breakdown.



**Figure 18:** Jižní Město in 1978 (*Panelstory*)

The soundtracks chosen for these films alone demonstrate this difference in directors' intended messages to the audience, with *Mud-covered City* having an upbeat jazz soundtrack that goes with the smiles of the residents, while *Panelstory* is filled with permanent sound of construction drills as an audio backdrop which gives the audience the sense of mental uneasiness. The portrayals of the appearance of the housing estates in these two films alone show big differences, with *Mud-covered City* depicting *Sídliště* in the early 1960s as organised and peaceful (with piles of pre-assembled panel walls being orderly placed one upon another) while *Panelstory* illustrates the opposite for the technocratic phase *Sídliště*, with piles of panel walls and rubbish scattering around without any order and fire mysteriously set in the trashcans (Figure 17 and 18). Both *Mud-covered City* and *Panelstory* play with reflections, but they produce different messages through them. The reflection of blocks of flats in Malešice in *Mud-covered City* looks just like what the building the actually looks like in reality, symmetrical and harmonious (Figure 19). On the other hand, the reflections of Jižní Město on the building windows and car window look clearly distorted, as if to ironically reflect the kind of lives the residents have, the lifestyle which is the product of their new living environment, absurd and without shape (Figure 20).



**Figure 19:** The reflection of *Zablácené mesto* (*Mud-covered City*)



**Figure 20:** The reflections of Jižní Město (*Panelstory*)

*A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*, produced only 3 years after *Panelstory*, portray Jižní Město the same way as *Panelstory* does, full of rubbish and piles of construction sand everywhere (Figure 21). The film, however, is much less provocative in its critical gestures, though the message is clear that technocratic phase *Sídliště* and its associated ideological aspirations of creating an ideal rational world with perfect symmetry and futuristic household time-saving machines are bad for humanity. *My Sweet Little Village*, produced two years after (by the main protagonist of *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*, Jiří Menzel himself), then accentuates the messages already introduced within *Panelstory* and *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*, though with the kind of satires which are much more “low-key” and less confrontational. Nový Barrandov was portrayed as it really was, clean and peaceful (Figure 22). It was the satirical message that is hidden inside the storyline itself that works as a strong critique of *Sídliště* in big cities in the late socialist time.



**Figure 21:** Jižní Město in 1982 (*A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*)



**Figure 22:** Nový Barrandov in 1985 (*My Sweet Little Village*)

In *Mud-covered City*, amidst the chaotic environment of Sídliště Malešice in the early 1960s, with muddy exterior space that makes it difficult for the residents to navigate, adults and children seem to try to make the best out of the situation they face. Residents are depicted to help each other, showing love and concerns for their friends, family members, and neighbours. Men help women carry prams across the muddy field, one carrying his wife in his arms, another holding a big dog while stepping onto the mud (Figure 23). Children joyfully react with the environment of the housing estate, with some throwing marbles on the muddy field, others playing with mud or using concrete parts as a table where they study or draw pictures for fun (Figure 24). Having her stuff dirty from the muddy field and from the construction dust, a woman cheerfully brushes off the dust from her pillow and shoes (Figure 25). These same images of residents on piles of muddy sand and broken concrete parts also appear in *Panelstory*, but the messages to the audience are the exact opposite. Unlike in *Mud-covered City*, residents in *Panelstory* do not seem to reconcile with the situation they are in, but still carry on with their struggle silently and isolately without asking for or offering helps to their fellow neighbours (Figure 26).





**Figure 23:** Hospitality and love inside *Zablácené mesto* (*Mud-covered City*)



**Figure 24:** Happily brushing dirt of pillows and shoes (*Mud-covered City*)



**Figure 25:** Children inside Zabláčené Město (*Mud-covered City*)



**Figure 26:** Residents walking on mud in Jižní Město (*Panelstory*)



**Figure 27:** Comparison between the roles of men and women (*Mud-covered City*)

The gender roles of men and women are highlighted very clearly both in *Mud-covered City* and *Panelstory*. In *Mud-covered City*, repeated shots of male workers energetically pushing their construction carts are sequentially placed side by side with the shots of mothers pushing their prams across the muddy field (Figure 27). In *Panelstory*,

women are either isolated in their apartments busy with the endless chores (Figure 28 and 29) or being outside aimlessly pushing their prams around, while men are either sitting in pubs having beers and socialising with their friends or working on the construction field with seemingly unending works. Some shots show men working on excavators that push big rocks here and there, picking up debris from one place to another, without any clear results to be seen (Figure 30). Everything seems to be in a rush, yet nothing seems to go anywhere. It is as if Chytilová makes a direct reference to Albert Camus’s “The Myth of Sisyphus” and the notion of the absurd in all human life’s activities. This is reflected in one line made by an old man character in the film, “everybody is in a hurry and never thinks twice about anything”, mirroring the attitude of people within a seemingly never-ending construction site, both the residents who seem to only mind their own business, and the constructors who are portrayed in the film merely as muted supporting characters, uncomplainingly doing their jobs of lifting panels walls here and there, as if they themselves are a part of the machines they are controlling.



**Figure 28:** The roles of women inside the flat (*Panelstory*)



**Figure 29:** The roles of women inside the flat (*Panelstory*)



**Figure 30:** Excavator pushing a rock (*Panelstory*)

In Hamilton’s reading, Lovejoy sees how *Panelstory* reflects Chytilová’s spatio-temporal critique of *Sídliště* in the way how the view of Prague core, equivalent to “the past” in Hamilton’s theory, is absent in the film, while “the future” of the housing estate is always “in progress” throughout the film.<sup>283</sup> Lovejoy interprets the shots of bare panel wall hanging and moving in the air by a crane as signifying both the potential of the future construction (the wall that it will become) and the persistence of the present (in which we see it hanging, suspending in the air) (Figure 32).<sup>284</sup> This state embodies the phrase in Bohumil Hrabal’s novel *Too Loud a Solitude* (1990) “the melancholy of a world eternally under construction”, which is also the title of Lovejoy’s essay.<sup>285</sup> Many different scenes in the film capture this melancholic feeling of lives which seem to be stuck in the stagnant stage of spatio-temporal ambiguity. One scene shows the main female character Sonja with her sense of unease

<sup>283</sup> See French and Hamilton, *The Socialist City*, 195–261; Lovejoy, “A world eternally under construction,” 256.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

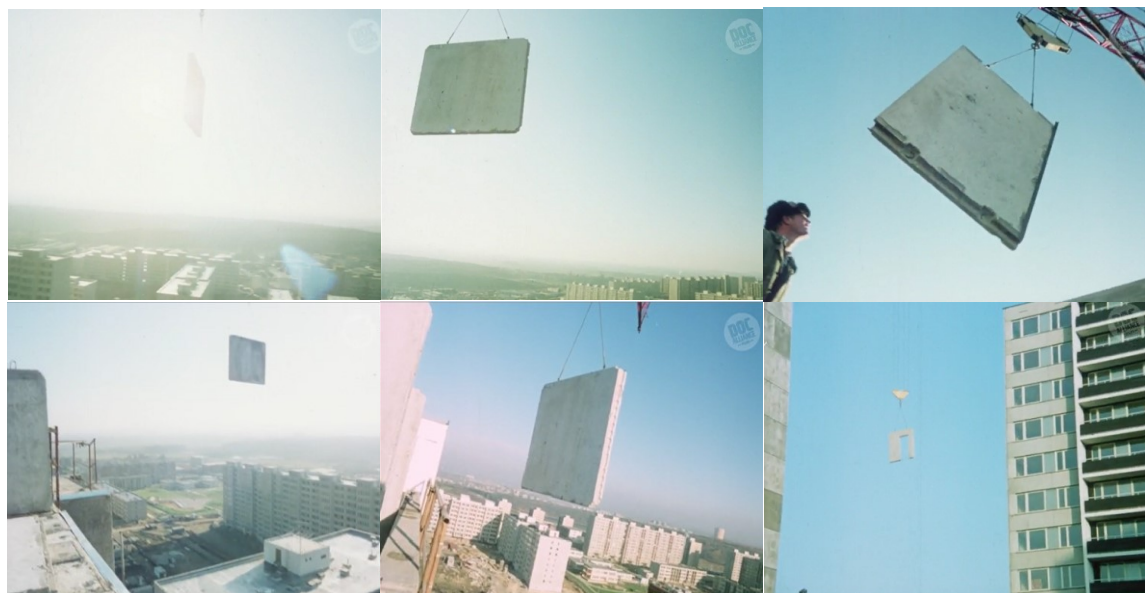
<sup>285</sup> Bohumil Hrabal, Michael Henry Heim (Trans.), *Too Loud a Solitude* (New York: Harcourt, 1990), 23, in Lovejoy, “A World eternally under construct,” 256.

reflected through her facial expressions, with shots of housing estates both one that is still being constructed and the other one which is already finished being juxtaposed alternately (Figure 33). After these shots are shown, Sonja is portrayed to be standing hopelessly inside a children's play structure which resembles blocks of *Paneláky* that she is looking at, and also where she is living inside. Being pregnant, her future seems to be fixed within this playground where her future child will be playing in, and within this housing estate where she will spend her life raising up her child. The children's play structure resembles the prison cells that seem to have locked her from the outside world. The prison cells allegory can also be seen in the repeated shots of old lady behind the steel balcony railings (that resembles prison cells) who lives alone inside her flat, doing nothing other than laying peacefully on her armchair while looking aimlessly at the view of blocks of flats outside her window (Figure 31).



**Figure 31:** Old lady (*Panelstory*)

The view of expansive open spaces with shots of blocks of grey buildings that look all the same seems to create a sense of agoraphobia, with no focal point to focus an attention on. Chytilová's idea of space inside Jižní město as portrayed in the film is highly claustrophobic, achieved through breathless kaleidoscopic montage or the fast-paced editing technique, and the magnification of the frame with the images of panel buildings and pre-assembled walls being quickly compressed with rapid zooms and whip pans, illustrating the viewers the constrained nature of life on the estate (Figure 34 and 35). The scene where the map of Africa and with tribal dance music in the background is put into direct comparison with that of the site of housing construction illustrates the primal nature, a kind of "Post-post-apocalyptic" scene, to which the housing estate is viewed (Figure 36).<sup>286</sup> The constant noise of construction drills as an audio backdrop throughout the film not only reflects the sense of "a world eternally under construction" (a subtle allegory to the stagnant progress of the building of socialism), but also gives the audience the deep sense of paranoia and unease, which goes hand in hand with the emotions of the main characters who seem to be stuck in the stage of "suptio-temporal" ambiguity, in which not only the view from one's own apartment window does not go beyond that of the next blocks of *Páneláky* that look all the same (spatial limit), but time itself does not seem to optimistically direct toward a better future (temporal limit).



**Figure 32:** Suspended Panel walls (*Panelstory*)

<sup>286</sup> The term "post-post-apocalyptic" is used to depict the scene in *Panelstory* by the film critic Pam Hahn in her comic Pam Hahn, "Panel Story," *Check it out, comic strip reviews* (5 June 2015), Retrieved from: [www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/reviews/2015/06/05/panel-story/](http://www.electricsheepmagazine.co.uk/reviews/2015/06/05/panel-story/); Accessed 5 July 2019.



**Figure 33:** Sonja vs. Paneláky (*Panelstory*)





**Figure 34:** Jižní  
Město (*Panelstory*)



**Figure 35:** Panel walls and Jižní Město (*Panelstory*)



**Figure 36:** Comparison between Africa and the construction site of Jižní Město (*Panelstory*)

As portrayed in the film, Jižní Město in the 1970s, unlike traditional town centres, is portrayed in *Panelstory* as lacking the sense of clarity and symbols that could have helped provide its residents with enough means to easily identify themselves with their neighbourhood. Drawing on Lefebvre’s theory of space. Kevin Lynch argued that the real space of the city is only comprehensible when it is mentally mappable.<sup>287</sup> Fredric Jameson further pushes this concept of the mental dimension of space, seeing it as “the imaginary representation of the subject’s relationship to his or her real conditions of existence.”<sup>288</sup> According to Jameson, our identities and the sense of belonging towards a place could be formed only when we are able to comprehend our position within the area, either in a district or city at large. Jameson calls this relationship between a mental construct and the physical/visual construct as “dual thinking” and the inability to create this dual thinking through a mental map leads to a sense of alienation towards the place.<sup>289</sup> Viewing through

<sup>287</sup> Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1960).

<sup>288</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Cognitive Mapping.” (1988), 353.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

Lefebvre's lens, "alienation", as a spatial concept, refers to the sense of distance and displacement, of being foreign and elsewhere, or with no "Sense of place". The structure of the housing estate without clear streets or squares created the sense of spatial disorientation as portrayed at the beginning of the film when the taxi driver asks people who live in the estate for the direction to the place where the daughter of the old man who just arrives from the countryside lives. The comment made by the old man to the taxi driver "I thought you know your way around in this Prague of yours." indirectly demonstrates how Jižní Město does not really fit into the sense of Prague which the taxi driver should have known his way around. The residents of the estate whom the taxi driver asks for a direction themselves, as shown in the film, also have difficulties telling them where the destination is located. Just as the estate is portrayed as isolated from the Prague core, the buildings and the residents in each building are depicted as isolated from each other. One woman informs them that there is supposed to be maps for orientation at the end of the street that would have helped them get to the flat they are looking for but she also adds casually "But you won't find them there just the same," stressing how the residents in the estate have already reconciled themselves to the sense of disorientation in their own living environment.

To compensate for this sense of disorientation in the public space, people seem to have striven to transform their interior spaces to make themselves feel the "sense of home" distinct from the monotonous impersonal exterior facade of *Paneláky* that they seem not to be able to identify with. Chytilová appeared to be on the same side as that of the feminist branch of Frankfurt School theorists who protested against the kind of living space where women are kept within an "imposed box" designed and constructed by men. Spending most of her time inside her apartment, the character in *Panelstory* Martha decorates her apartment with great care, with kitchen tools being in perfect order. Her flat is fully equipped with all the latest domestic appliances, with beautiful wallpapers and warm light coming from the window reflecting on her white curtains. This is a good illustration of the saying "My home is my castle", the saying which is widely used to describe the way residents of housing estates in different places inhabit their apartments. The high-rise lifestyle was new to the newly moved in residents of Jižní Město, as seen when Sonja asks her friend Martha if she feels "like a princess sometimes", living in an apartment nicely decorated on a high floor which, to Sonja, is like living "in a princess tower". This is Chytilová's attempt at satirising contemporary women's lives which though seem like a nice way of life on the surface, with

modern equipment like refrigerator and automatic washing machine available to help take some chore-related burdens away. Nonetheless, deep down beneath this rosy facade, women still struggle with their roles of housekeeping which seem to have isolated them even more from the outside world.



**Figure 37:** Martha's statements to Sonja (*Panelstory*)

Another motif which *Mud-covered City*, *Panelstory*, and also *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth* touch, is the theme of consumption, with all three films showing the abundance of food and consumer products available for the residents of the estates. *Mud-covered City* compares stacks of pre-assembled concrete panels with rows of bread, and the tap with flowing water with draft beer flowing from beer tap dispenser, highlighting the twin promises by the state to fulfil the socialist aims of providing better quality of lives to its citizens in the realm of mass-housing and food consumption (Figure 38). *Panelstory*, on the other hand, uses supermarket full of products only as a background site where characters interact, showing how the abundance of food had already become a norm, something that

was taken for granted to the point that stacks of bread could be seen dumped in the trashcans everywhere. In *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*, shelves in a supermarket are also full of consumer products. By mirroring the actions of the ordinary people who do a shopping in the supermarket, two aliens in a human form (who come to Earth to study human nature) put piles of products into their trolleys which form a long row at the end (Figure 39). Instead of addressing the theme of consumption with a positive connotation, *Panelstory* and *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth* pose a problem that comes out of it, the wasteful over-consumption of the citizens. These scenes reflect how the Communist regime provided a caricature of consumer society, with the citizens' main interest being in consumerist orientation, in other words, a kind of goulash socialism.



**Figure 38:** Hot and cold shower vs. Beer tap (*Mud-covered City*)



**Figure 39:** Over-consumption (*A Heartfelt Greeting From Earth*)

One positive theme that could be taken from *Panelstory* is how the housing estates were the site for social levellers, and thus living up to the socialist goal of achieving social equality, bringing all types of people with different kinds of occupations into the same district. The film, however, does not state this explicitly. Instead, the problem of the housing shortage is highlighted in the film, with the pregnant lady nagging about how her family has been waiting for a flat for five years but no place is given to her, so she has to get the flat with an illegal means. This problem of apartment “squatting” (in a similar sense to what happened in the Soviet Union, see Chapter 2) seems to be also confirmed within the film critique of the socialist state in Czechoslovakia.

The theme about the improved “quality of life” through the provision of equipped flats, though is missing in *Mud-covered city*, appears both in *Panelstory*, *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*, and *My Sweet Little Village* (which will be later analysed below). *Panelstory* is strongly provocative in addressing the problem of the finish of the flats, though fully equipped with modern equipment, many things do not function as they are supposed to. The film plays on the poor quality and slapdash construction of the technocratic phase *Sídliště*, with newly built apartments missing staircases, entrance door, doorknob, cooker and kitchen cupboard, erratic water supply, radiator and gas-pipe placing in the wrong place, elevator breaking down and stuck half-way, and a boiler room with a hole in the floor that a man falls into and injures himself. The conversation between Marie, mother of Sonja, and the male commissioner who takes the role of resolving all flat-related issues reflects Chytilová’s knack for absurdity via characters’ ironical lines (Figure 40). Architects of the housing estate and their “unpleasant design” are being criticised through the points made by a blond-hair actor Kodeš:

**Kodeš:** You don’t differentiate between things pleasant or unpleasant, but only between things useful and useless, right?

**Marie:** I’m afraid I don’t have enough imagination for this sort of things.

**Kodeš:** That’s the point, people don’t have an imagination. Look out of the window. Do you see all those straight lines and right angles? Nowhere any charming, unnecessary nonsense. The architect who designed this housing estate was too damned economical, because all he thought of was strict usefulness. Man is like a mirror, he reflects only what is around him.



**Figure 40:** “First-rate architects” (*Panelstory*)

Kodeš’s statement reminds us of what Adolf Loos claimed at the turn of the century, about modernist architecture which he praised as exemplifying the notion of “usefulness” while traditional style with ornaments was being perceived as “useless.” Not only that Kodeš views the architecture of technocratic phase *Sídliště* as “unpleasant”, it was also for him “unnecessary nonsense” and in a way “useless.” Kodeš explains the reason behind this as resulting from economic limit and the architects’ focus on “strict usefulness.” At the end, the technocratic phase *Sídliště* is portrayed in the film to have achieved none of both, the pleasant looking, and the usefulness (as most of the things in the building do not seem to function well). One constructor in the film justifies the poor quality of the construction with the time pressure that was pressed on them. Chytilová, however, does not stop by just blaming everything on time pressure. Constructors in the film appear to spend most of their time chilling in the bar, some doing moonlighting jobs, or having sexual affair with a female resident, while at the same time complaining that they do not have time to help people with little things as “the construction work is very important” that they cannot find a spare time to do something else. This same message also appears in *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*



which depicts the same image of lazy constructors who refuse to work on the construction site. They call this kind of job “Cursed, fucking job!”, and instead chilling out with friends in a pub. Only the alien creatures, who are in need of information about humankind so that they could report it back to their galaxy, ask for this “Cursed, fucking job!” without knowing what they are going to face. Not being able to comprehend the nature and the purpose of the job which involves digging soil with shovels, they end up doing the work much better than the actual constructors who look at the aliens and their productive progress in amaze (Figure 41).



**Figure 41:** *Aliens digging soil without knowing how to use equipment or the purpose of their actions (A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth)*

The scene also demonstrates how the director intends to satire those who energetically follow the rules and duties inside the system, as if they are aloof and down-to-earth aliens who know nothing about the rhetoric and purposes behind all human’s activities. In *Panelstory*, the workers who are supposed to fix things that do not work in each flat are portrayed as lazy. Knowing that the pregnant lady who lives in a flat illegally wants to be

left alone so that her presence is not being checked by authorities, the male workers are happy and encourage people to get flats in such way so that they no longer have to go into any flat to do their fixing jobs. In this sense, the technocratic phase *Sídliště* can be read as a site where tensions between architects and constructors come into play, with the result of a kind of buildings that seem to “materialize two conflicting inconsistent architectures” (as Žižek leaves his remark), that of workers who could not care less about the quality and look of the buildings, and that of the architects who put much efforts in their creative design planning. In a way, arguably, the practice of constructors who appear to be lazy and doing bad works could be read as a kind of “spontaneous” act of rebelling against the system itself, with the result of *Paneláky* being in poor conditions (constructors’ role and time limit), and with strict functionalist look (due to functionalist ideology and economic and technological limit), but also with some post-modern facades (creative architects’ role) being the visual and ideological culminations of different types of dissent. This description goes along the same lines as that of Macura’s analysis on the “stylistic impurity” of Czechoslovak cultural product as a result of its complicated progress within the “small culture” that was expected to be different from that other big cultures. This kind of “hybrid” in arts and architecture of Czechoslovakia, Macura argued, demonstrates “the inner stylistic haziness” as a result of the need to compensate for current artistic development, as if “at once.”<sup>290</sup>

The partially constructed estate is portrayed alongside the partially constructed community within it. The site is portrayed as bringing about the disruption in the social and moral life of its residents which could be read as working as another type of “spontaneous” dissent. The lack of trust and social paranoia is reflected throughout the film, as can be seen in many scenes that portray a red-jacket boy running around from place to place, hiding behind cars and piles of rubble or running away from people whom he does not trust (almost everyone), particularly a middle-aged male thief with a candy in his hand who tries to steal the estate's infrastructural bits. The boy explores and interacts with the chaotic environment of Jižní Město with a sense of curiosity and anxiety (Figure 42). A pregnant single mum with two children who live illegally in an apartment that does not belong to her nervously spies on people from her apartment window, being afraid of being reported by their neighbours or caught by authorities. The old man, being concerned about the well-being of the old lady who lives alone in her apartment, is told off as being intrusive, “Why bother about her? At

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<sup>290</sup> Macura, *Znamení zrodu*, 14.

least she's got a bit of peace. (...) If I were in your place, I'd stay home and enjoy the peace and quietness," suggested a young-adult man and a lady at the cigarette kiosk to the old man, reflecting the attitude well-known during the Normalisation era in Czechoslovakia, a retreat into a private sphere. The sites of newly built large-scale housing estates of the technocratic phase seemed to promote exact same kind of attitude that the Party-State wished to endorse, a private retreat of the citizens away from public political activities that could have led to political skirmishes. Ironically, it seems that the last thing the regime wished to have in the socialist state was the publicly active Communists who valued the notion of collectivism and concerned about their fellow socialist citizens, according to the message derived from this film.



**Figure 42:** A red-jacket boy mirroring his environment (*Panelstory*)

Direct communications between residents are portrayed as nearly impossible without intermediaries. Without the telephone, the residents communicated through letters and other alternative means of interacting. Sonja, for example, sends her message to her boyfriend via a young boy. While the private domestic space is expected to help the residents lead the comfortable living experience with standardized and compartmentalized interior space, the lives inside each flat are portrayed as unruly as the space outside it with piles of rubbish and construction debris taking up most of the public space in the estate. The availability of space

inside separated flat for each family (unlike in communal flats in the old time where a large number of people share a single flat) seems to isolate people and brings them furthermore into the “private sphere” away from the disorderly outside world (the public space full of rubbish and muddy sand and dust). However, this does not mean that they could easily find peace as they retreat into their private space in a separated family flat. A pregnant mother with a bob-hair son endlessly complains about how the “stupid system” has driven her crazy, leaving her with chaotic situation in the kitchen with a big pile of dirty dishes laying in the sink waiting to be washed by her without any help from her husband (Figure 29). Not only just her who begs for “some peace” in her life, most of the characters in the film voice the same message repeatedly, with both constructors and residents telling each these following synonymous phrases: “mind your own business”, “it has nothing to do with me”, “it’s not our problem”, or “we don’t mess with your problem, so don’t mess with ours.” Some residents choose rather to “escape” into their own worlds, as can be seen in how the lonely elderly woman sits quietly in her flat on her armchair day-dreaming of Africa where her son lives, listening to the voice tape of her son talking about how the opportunity to live in a nice area is one of the best things one can get in life, as if to rationalise the situation she is in, searching for a justification of her lonely existence inside the housing estate:

**Sound from a radio tape:** “And then, what one does need from life? A roof over my head I have. (...) It’s wonderful here. A nice area. They think that sort of thing is important here, where you live. You simply have to live in a good area.”

Besides this tactic to deal with the undesirable situation in the form of cognitive dissonance, the wish to escape completely elsewhere is shown in the ending scene when Sonja asks herself if she “would rather fly to the moon” instead of having a normal life inside the housing estate with her boyfriend and the expected new-born child. “No, nobody will ever get me out of here”, calmly replied Sonja to her own question before the film ends with a soundtrack of a person furiously screaming and the rising moon behind the shadow of dark walls of *Paneláky* at night, as if to reflect the bleak prospect of the future of the characters’ lives. Sonja’s self-reflection exhibits her sense of acceptance to the situation and societal expectations that are being imposed on her. Different characters in *Panelstory* seem to be

stuck in the spacio-temporal cage of *Sídlišťe* without any hope that they can actually escape (Figure 43).



**Figure 43:** “Would you rather fly to the moon?” (*Panelstory*)

Only 3 years after *Panelstory* was banned, Oldrich Lipský came up with a crazy-comedy satire *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth* which revolves around the story of two aliens (who come to study human nature) disguised in the shape of human landing in a trashcan (as to disguise themselves by mirroring the Earth’s environment) on a field full of rubbish connected to the site of Jižní Město (Figure 44). These aliens (called A and B) are mesmerised by the scene they encounter around the estate full of rubbish which they interpret as what human perceive as beauty (that is why they are everywhere), and inside each flat with household machines that work like a magic to them (reflecting the success of state’s aspiration to improve “quality of life”). This seemingly improved quality of life, nevertheless, comes at a cost. The futuristic automatic food processing machines that resemble the vending machines in the canteen do not work properly as it should, and even

make life even harder. The wastes produced by the new modern lifestyles piling up like a big hill on the site next to the housing estate, with nuclear power plant in the background of a deserted sandy area without any tree (as a result of deforestation and building construction), and a natural reserve area that does not have anything “natural” in it (Figure 45). While going up in a crane to clean windows of the high-rise flats and looking from a bird’s eye view at the whole housing estate, the aliens comment on how “There is such an order in it. Harmony! Architecture!” Later on, the aliens make an animation report to their galaxy, with the image of how lives on Earth is like, with the picture of blocks of *Paneláky* in different sizes, as if to sum up the natural rule of human life (Figure 46). This is clearly a sarcastic message from the director. Lipský, the director of the film, not being able to voice his critical stance against technocratic phase *Sídliště* directly from his own point of view (like Chytilová did in *Panelstory* only to be banned by the state), the characters of alien creatures from a faraway galaxy have to be invented to be used as intermediary tools to reflect the critical situations of *Sídliště* environment.



**Figure 44:** Two aliens landing in a Trashcan on Jižní mesto (*A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*)



**Figure 45:** The environment around the estate (*A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*)



**Figure 46:** “Harmony! Architecture!” (*A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*)

Despite this, the direct critical messages still cannot be demonstrated in the film. Instead, the critical language takes the form of sarcastic praises, surprisingly going in the same direction as the state's rhetoric of "quality of life" went. Outwardly taking the same stance as that of the state but in an exaggerated gesture, *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth* is a work of art that is the direct product of Normalisation, the epitome of the nature of it. It criticizes the regime and its policy without outwardly making it seem so, just like how Normalisation regime used the language of "normalised" life and "quality of life" rhetoric as a facade of what was going underneath.

Lives inside Jižní Město as portrayed in Lipský's film appear as normal (from the viewpoint of all the characters in the film, with the residents of the estate casually jogging on piles of rubbish), but humorously absurd from the perspective of the audience. This is typical to many of the films produced within the Soviet Union during the late socialism. Reality itself is illustrated in an absurd way. "In such realities, what is normally taken for humour is serious and seriousness itself is comic."<sup>291</sup> Emblematic to most of East European comedies, story-lines and gags in *Panelstory* (to a lesser extent), *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth* (to a greater extent) and *My Sweet Little Village* (in the most hidden gesture) similarly appear as deadpan and sly spin-offs of "ordinary" realism, capturing "real reactions to absurd stimuli" while at the same time accentuating the "disturbed relationship to reality."<sup>292</sup> This is reflected in one scene at the beginning of *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*. Dr. Jánký (played by Menzel, the director of *My Sweet Little Village*, who is for me the Woody Allen of Czechoslovakia) wakes up to a peaceful environment of his flat with a radioman speaking with calm voice and classical music played in the background. As soon as he opens his apartment window to take a deep breath in (as suggested by the radioman), Dr. Jánký gazes out at the view of *Paneláky* from his window then suddenly coughs out the toxic air full of dust that he just has just inhaled. A sudden visual and environmental shock makes him decide

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<sup>291</sup> Charles Eidsvik, "Mock realism: The comedy of futility in Eastern Europe," in Andrew S. Horton (ed.), *Comedy/Cinema/Theory* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1991), 103.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 92; Hanáková, "The Films We Are Ashamed Of," 114.



to hurriedly close the window (and the window knob falls down) and go back into his peaceful environment inside his own flat (Figure 47).



**Figure 47:** Opening the window to reality (*A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*)

The critical gesture of this scene reminds us of the parallax gap analysis made by Žižek who articulates his point as followed:

“The inner structure, the interior of the buildings [the post-modern buildings, in his context] hang within the enormous container like so many floating organs. Just like a box, you see the gap between inside and outside. (...) However, one should not misunderstand this emphasis on the incommensurability between the outside and the inside. One should not misunderstand it as a critique relying on the demand for some kind of non-alienated continuity between the two. The incommensurability between the outside and the inside is, I claim, a kind of transcendental a priori in our most elementary phenomenological experience. The reality we see through a window when we look outside from the inside of the car (...) is not as fully, and as real as the closed space where we are. That is why when we drive in a car, we perceive the reality outside in a strange

de-realised stage as if one is watching a performance on the screen. When you open the window of a car, the direct impact of the external reality always causes a minimal shock. You are overwhelmed by the proximity of the outside. That is also why when we enter the closed space of the house, we are often surprised, as if the inside is larger than the outside, as if the house is larger from the inside as from the outside. My point is that the moment we have this minimal enclosure architecture, (we also have) the division between the inside and the outside. The two are radically incommensurable.”<sup>293</sup>

Living inside a box, in one of the floating organs within a larger box, a tiny box looks so insignificant when viewing from the outside. Dr. Jánský, by suddenly closing his window only a couple of seconds after he opens it, demonstrates how he prefers a clear boundary between his inside private space and the outside space of *Sídliště* which appears to have overwhelmed him visually and olfactorily. His will to retreat back into the private sphere, the space of his own, is the direct product of the negative environment of the public space centrally determined by the state (the architecture of *Sídliště* and the air pollution as a result of rubbish smell and the toxic air from the nuclear power plant). The only space he can perceive his life as significant is inside his own flat, where, as Žižek puts it, the house is larger than from the outside. In other words, the “sense of home” does not come from the outside, but the inside of the flat where the residents have the freedom to readjust their everyday environment according to their own free wills. This is another way of explaining the retreat into the private sphere of the ordinary citizens of socialist Czechoslovakia during the Normalisation era, as a direct reaction to the environmental senses, and not just from political repression or rigid political climate as most political historians have claimed.

Half a decade after *Panelstory* was banned, Jiří Menzel directed *My Sweet Little Village* which also plays with the theme of late socialist *Sídliště*. The film was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1987.<sup>294</sup> This time, the image of *Sídliště* is portrayed differently to that of Jižní město in *Panelstory* and *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*. *Sídliště* Nový Barrandov in Menzel’s film in the mid-1980s is clean and peaceful. Another way of looking at it is that it is portrayed as too peaceful as if the district

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<sup>293</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “The third locus inbetween outside and inside Slavoj Zizek Post Modern Architecture 2014 YouTube1,” (Posted on YouTube by “minos777”, 12 February 2014), Retrieved from: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwxalA6P7aA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwxalA6P7aA), Accessed: 15 July 2019.

<sup>294</sup> “The 59th Academy Awards (1987) Nominees and Winners,” [oscars.org](http://oscars.org).

is deserted, as if there is no life there (Figure 22). The motif of the film with regards to the theme of *Sídliště* is not about the everyday lives of the residents inside the housing estate. Instead, *My Sweet Little Village* stages a case of an architectural antagonism between that of the rows of *Paneláky* in the suburb of the capital city and the separated tiny village houses in the countryside. A mentally challenged Karel Otík is caught between the new modern lifestyle in Prague's newly finished Nový Barrandov with equipped flush toilet and the small village house in the countryside without flush toilet, but with his friends and neighbours whom he grew up with (Figure 48). Unlike *Panelstory* which uses all its energy to pose questions but does not give any answer to all the characters' life struggles, and unlike *A Heartfelt Greeting From Earth* which gives questionable solutions (such as getting a psychiatrist for a burnout scientist who is recommended to go into a fake forest in the form of "natural reserve" to relax a bit before returning to work, or suggesting that the world should be made to be even more "rationalised" by building more *Sídliště* until the world reaches a Utopian phase), *My Sweet Little Village* offers a solution against the psychopathology of socialist space exemplified by the construction of large-scale housing estates. Menzel's solution is simply to negate the new modern lifestyle that is offered by the socialist state, and just retreat into the countryside.



**Figure 48:** Modern lifestyle in Prague vs. Village lifestyle (*My Sweet Little Village*)



**Figure 49:** Quality Life inside the new flat (*My Sweet Little Village*)

In *My Sweet Little Village*, the mentally retarded Otík who works as an assistant truck driver with a guy named Pávek is tricked by a corrupted politician into taking employment in Prague and moving into a half-constructed Nový Barrandov so that the politician could take on Otík's inherited house in the countryside as his weekend retreat. The real estate commissioner, in need of getting his money commission, put in great efforts to lure Otík into taking the job offer and moving into the new flat which is advertised by him as modern and fully furnished with latest models of kitchen appliance, flush toilet, and shower with hot and cold water (Figure 49). Being retarded, Otík seems to be surprised with great joy by all the things that are shown by the commissioner guy in the flat, despite the fact that most of the things there seem to be in bad conditions, with shower without running water, and kitchen shelf and electric wires broken. The scene can be interpreted as critical of the “quality of life” policy of the regime, which did not seem to actually give that level of quality promised. The new flats offered to the citizens do not look fully finished and the people who do happily take these flats as their own are implicitly depicted as if they were mentally retarded just like Otík who does not complain about any defect of the flat provided for him. Otík happily accepts the offer and moves into his new estate that looks almost abandoned, hidden behind

a big pile of sand when observing from afar. The only sources of enjoyment he seems to get from the environment inside his flat are the sound of toilet flushing and the latest technology of rotating windows (Figure 50). The whole scene is portrayed as if Otík is isolately abandoned, being dumped into an absurd environment that he cannot identify with. The image of Otík with both of his hands on the glass window of his flat looking outside seems as if he is stuck in a cage inside the larger unit of *Sídliště* which, to the audience, could be viewed in the same sense as that of a prison camp.

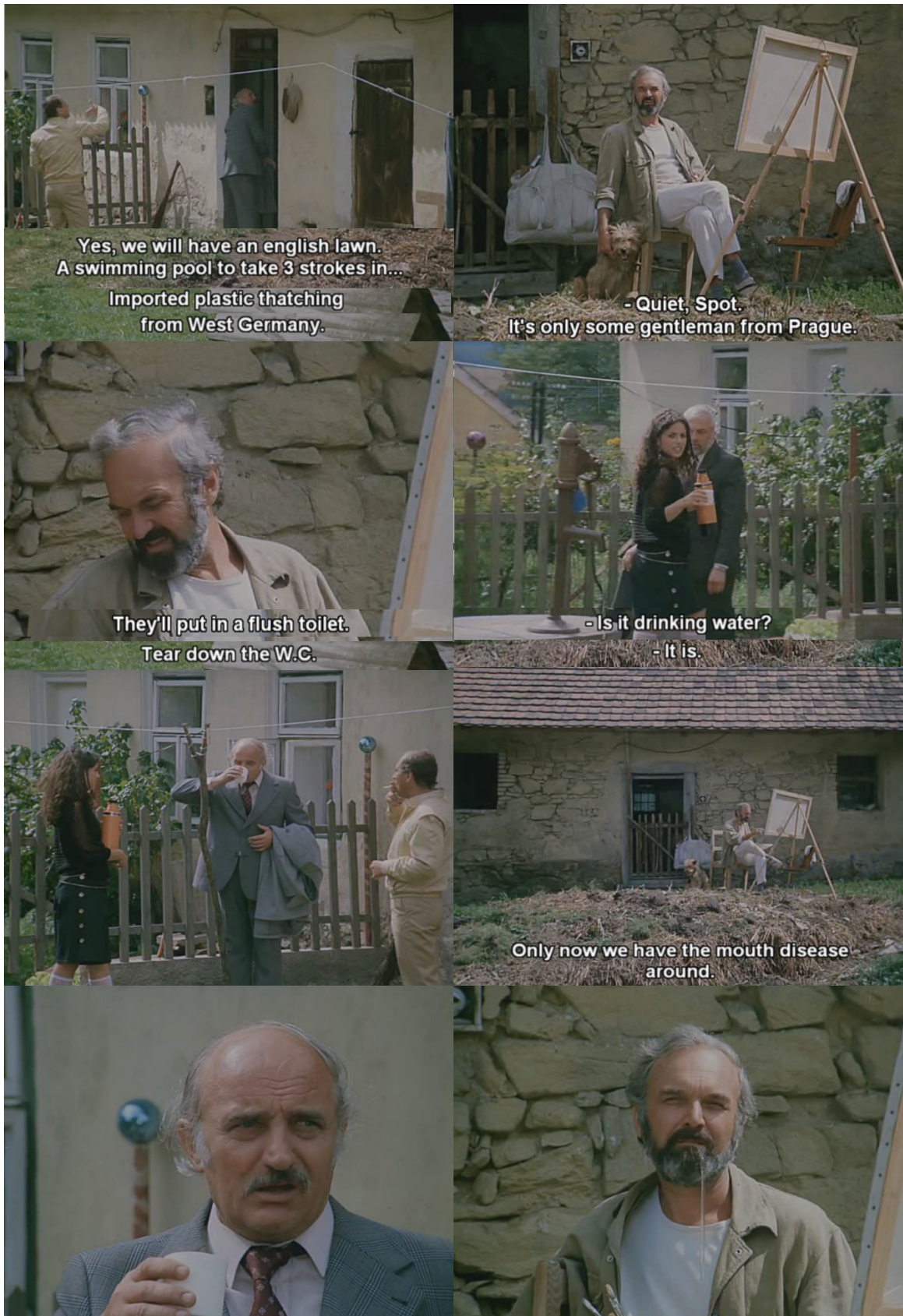


**Figure 50:** Otík moving into Nový Barrandov (*My Sweet Little Village*)

After knowing that the state politician is going to take Otík's cottage house and renovate it into a modern style (ironically with imported products from the West), Pávek gives Otík a second chance to get back to work in the countryside and to retrieve his own cottage house. The "low key" confrontation between the village man who is a painter, and the politician and his young female secretary from Prague who come to see the house, could be hilariously read in Figure 52. At the end, Otík decides with his own free will to reject the modern life in Prague and happily runs back to the countryside with his workmate Pávek. The scene of Otík running in the opposite direction of where all the *Sídliště* residents are walking to, symbolises the dissenting act of Otík against what is expected from him in the society, a kind of robotic worker who marches to work as if he/she is a part of a flock of sheep (Figure 51). All in all, *My Sweet Little Village* is the film that confirms the phenomenon of *chata mania* and the popular retreat into the private sphere articulated by Paulina Bren. Not only that it reflects this trend, it also justifies it as a reasonable solution within the climate of late socialist time. The strongly critical message, in my opinion, comes from the very fact within the film that even a mentally retarded man could think for himself and chooses the best for his life by rejecting the modern lifestyle offered to him inside *Sídliště*.



**Figure 51:** Otík running against the tide of suburb residents who are walking to the metro station (Left). Otík going back to work in the village with Pávek (Right)



**Figure 52:** Low-key tension between the village man and the governor from Prague (*My Sweet Little Village*)

The attack is, therefore, directed not just at the political regime, but also at the people, the socialist subjects, the main reference of socialism which legitimatised the existence of the regime. Those who watched the film would have to ask themselves again what kind of lifestyle they would like to have, and in which kind of environment they would like to live in. The suggestive message from the ending scene is clear. The retreat into the countryside is the best option, even the state politician himself wants to have a house there. This may seem as if the film takes an optimistic stance by providing an answer to the character. The deeper reading, however, reveals the opposite. The modern lifestyle in the city, specifically within the late socialist *Sídliště*, is something that can no longer be fixed for the better, and that the only way one can search for a meaningful lifestyle is to leave and to go to have a life completely somewhere else. Reading it in this way, *My Sweet Little Village* is not an optimistic film that reflects the political climate of the late 1980s (that of glasnost and perestroika), but a pessimistic film that critically condemns contemporary modern lifestyle and the socialist system that brought it into existence.

As demonstrated, official symbolism and rhetoric within the context of late socialist *Sídliště* was confronted by the unofficial mockery from the critiques within the artistic sphere. Like many comedy films that were popular in the Soviet bloc, all four film which have been analysed, *Mud-covered City*, *Panelstory*, *A Heartfelt Greeting from Earth*, and *My Sweet Little Village*, record ordinary “normal” behaviours, with the comic effect created through the reference to the everyday life of the audiences, allowing them “to react in terms of an imagined world suggested by the film – one that is incongruous and funny.”<sup>295</sup> The films reproduce images of everyday life without any apparent political context, without any explicit politically related messages, but at the same time, shows the directors’ political intention and also a potential of producing political effect among the audience. Serious and frustrating situations are delivered as gags to be laughed at. Just like how Normalisation works for the Communist apparatus, the most effective manner that ideological/dissent messages could be delivered to the audience through films is not in the upfront propaganda or direct protesting messages, but in the hollow-on-the-surface comedic scenes about normal-yet-absurd everyday life inside the socialist space. Absurd normality becomes laughable only when the audience could relate to it. These films use paradoxical humour to expose life’s absurdities critically, with the hope that these absurd situations would not be

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<sup>295</sup> Eidsvik, “Mock realism,” 93.



accepted with compliance, but to be acted on. These films, the very epitome of escapism and parody to lives during the late socialism, were ones that satisfied the audience the most, and therefore had an effect of effectively penetrating deeply into the consciousness of the ordinary people who found the characters and the storylines most relatable to their actual lives. Jiří Menzel himself reflected that comedic films about everyday life were ones that the Communist regime feared the most: “Regimes are afraid of humour because it’s more direct, clearer to the audience.”<sup>296</sup> Similar to how the regime during the Normalisation period did not give out strong propagandic messages to the citizens, but managed the citizens to be ritualistically subservient and obedient through the normalized practices of everyday life, the cultural producers of the period also absorb similar strategies into their works, by subtly putting their messages in a way not so visible on the surface, but having an effect of penetrating deeply in the mind of the ordinary citizens.

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<sup>296</sup> Judith Vidal-Hall, “Jiří Menzel: The art of laughter and survival,” *Index on Censorship* 24: 6 (2007), 120. DOI: 10.1080/03064229508536003.

## Conclusion

Architectural style and history determine and define each other, functioning as underpinnings for each other. The evolution of the architecture of Sídliště in post-war Czechoslovakia can be read as revealing a social and psychological image of Czechoslovak citizens as if on the reverse side of official history. Crucially, these housing estates are the defining urban form of socialist cities. However, they not only existed in history as their impact is also felt in the post-socialist era, even nowadays. Due to their looks alone, it is hard for them to shed their socialist guise. Those who actually lived through the socialist era and experienced their lives in those estates felt the direct link between residential ensembles and socialist ideology. On the other hand, those who grow up in these estates in the post-socialist era seem to perceive their homes more objectively. Time has proven that the situation is gradually changing, but to what extent is it better than what occurred during the late socialism is the question for those who have the power to make changes and improvements to these still-existing remnants of socialist urban planning, but this time under the name of the capitalistic democracy.

I began the research with the presupposition that Normalisation was connected to the building of technocratic housing estates. The physical look of the housing estates of this period alone gives me the impression that there should be something hidden behind the time and circumstances when they were planned and built. After having done all the analyses, I have come to the conclusion that the post-war Czechoslovak prefabricated housing estates, far from being imposed from outside, were rooted in the continuation and development of transnational architectural practices and politics since inter-war years, with the pace of construction being accelerated by circumstances specific to socialist Czechoslovakia. The ideas behind the creation of these housing estates were not only related to their physical appearance which shows the direct connection to modernist architecture, but also their aspiration to make a positive change in the name of socialist modernization. In other words, the architectural model of modernist-functionalist which was chosen for the technocratic phase Sídliště represents not merely a physical model, but also a model for a wide-scaled social, political and economic life of the Czechoslovak citizens. These post-war housing estates were not only the realization of avant-garde modernist ideas originated in the inter-war era, but also the realization of the technocratic and bureaucratic socialist concepts of an

ideal society. In the realization of these housing estates during the Normalisation era, the roles of politicians, developers, planners, and constructors existed alongside the economic and technological limits under which architects operated, and against whom they are most of the time powerless to resist.

As chapter 2 has demonstrated, the fusion of Communism and modernist-functionalism ideas predated the beginning of Czechoslovak State-Socialism. The avant-garde of the 1920s has some connections with the mass construction of Czechoslovak panel housing estates which peaked during the technocratic phase of housing construction in the post-war time, sharing some similar ideas that sought to scientifically organize society through a built environment that prioritizes order and stylistic unity. This is not to say, however, that the latter was the fulfilment of the idea of the former. To a great extent, with the ideas behind large-scale housing estates in post-war Europe sharing the same roots within the European-wide housing crisis which sprang from the parallel crisis of modernity, capitalist space and socialist space might be perceived as two sides of the same coin, in other words, the different versions of modernism. Crucially, we often miss the point of art and architecture, particularly modernist-functionalism ones, by interpreting them as creative and innovative forms. Behind their poetic facades, we can see the strong existential involvement and repudiation of traditions, as can be observed in the development of Czechoslovak “High Modernism.” The inter-war democratic Czechoslovak members of the cultural “vanguard of modernism,” to some degree, supported the Communist ideology and its scientific theory relating to the notions of rationalism and technological progress. This arguably assisted the transition from the inter-war democratic First Republic of Czechoslovakia to the post-war socialist state with a Communist social program that idealized specific Czechoslovak road to socialism.

The circumstances that led to the making of socialist housing estates of the technocratic phase make it clear that the architecture and urbanism of this kind were not imposed on Czechoslovak people from the outside, nor was it directly associated with ideas specific to Communist principles. By emphasizing the links, rather than the rupture, between the inter-war democratic Czechoslovakia and the post-war socialist Czechoslovakia, this could help expose the political rhetoric that uses Manichean way of looking at the politics of Czechoslovak collective memory which divides history into good (idealized conceptions of the democratic First Republic of Czechoslovakia) and bad periods (post-war

Czechoslovakia under Communism). Some characteristics of the lifestyle during the post-war Czechoslovakia, and in particular, the Normalisation era, developed in direct connection with the prewar and early post-war thinking with regard to lifestyle and ideal housing architecture for all. This, however, does not mean to negate the notion of “Normalisation”, but to highlight the indebtedness of the discourse of “socialist way of life” to the reformulation of modernist-functionalist ideas that transcend historical periodisation. Many of the housing policies and their effects went beyond the demarcation line of the year 1968. Truly, though the peak time of the construction of housing estates appeared during the Normalisation period in the 1970s, many of the policies that affected the decisions and plans of the “Normalizers” who physically realized these estates were implemented during the 1960s, with the roots and the ideas being carefully devised and prepared in the preceding decades, going back as early as the inter-war period.

Regarding the connection between socialism and modernism, as far as the Czechoslovak case is concerned, it is misleading to talk about the “interrupted modernization” when concerns the late socialism in the socialist bloc countries, or “Normalisation” period in Czechoslovakia. What existed was not the stagnation of modernization or industrialization, but more about the illusions about the modernization potential of Communism with much of the method borrowed from inter-war “High Modernism.” The result was some kind of dysfunctional extensive modernization in the form of industrial development, and with the end of socialism (and the path leading to it during the late socialism) being accompanied by the dissident's desire to drive forward post-modernist approaches as to counteract the paradoxical anti-modernist effects created by the modernist practice itself. This is articulated in Chapter 3 which evaluates the nature of different types of criticism of technocratic phase Sídliště as a part of the wider dissident movement during late socialism.

The socialist centralization of the Czechoslovak state which was accompanied by the centralization of architectural practice shows its rhetorical language that endorses a collective endeavour. Paradoxically, as demonstrated in the sections which discuss about the Czechoslovak films with Sídliště theme and the philosophical critique mainly that of Havel's “Life if truth”, it was the product of the construction of housing estates for all as a part of the “building of socialism” program that provided the premises for the citizens’ retreat into the private sphere, the antithesis to the socialist notion of collectivism that the socialist state

energetically promoted in rhetorical discourse. With regard to architectural practice that defied technocratic phase Sídliště, it appears that Czechoslovak state socialism had produced its own forms of postmodern architecture. The late socialist architectural turn to history could be seen as a direct reaction to the excessiveness of architectural functionalism inside the country which was perceived as an aberration to the historical continuity in terms of traditional architectural style. Imported ideas, namely postmodernism from the west and socialist realism from the East, were adopted as umbrella concepts which were then transformed by the architectural critics to suit the circumstances of Czechoslovakia, resulting in a unique form of Czechoslovak postmodern neo-socialist realist architectural ideas. Architects of late socialist Czechoslovakia could be seen, to a certain degree, as a part of the dissident current who explored the possibilities of practice challenging the limits of architecture, engineering practice, and the socio-political paradigm of late socialism.

Within this “grey zone” of technocratic phase Sídliště, there existed “grey zones” of (in)action, negotiation, compromise, and negation. Within the context of criticism against technocratic phase Sídliště, Czechoslovak Normalisation created a special kind of politics that was not driven by those from below (which, in this context, refers to the residents of the housing estates), but rather from intellectuals and artists within the artistic sphere. Dissident attacks on late socialist Sídliště resonated well with wider narratives of neo-liberal transition in Western Europe about the role of government in society and related attitudes toward public housing, as well as the post-modern trend in the realms of arts and architecture. These critiques stood for the very paradigm of Czechoslovak dissidence, a kind of protest with “velvet” characters, soft and unfrontational. They did not take the form of revolutionary activists or outwardly public dissidence. They were uncoordinated but at the same time highly tactical. In a way, these isolated groups of critique formed a kind of hybridisation in the sense explained by Macura, with different methods of struggle that ultimately formed a dissident movement with the nature that was specific to the Czechoslovak context. Czechoslovak artists interacted with their physical and social atmospheres of late socialist Sídliště and created artworks that subjectively reflected their views on the contemporary conditions. As demonstrated in the last section, cinematic style and politics appear to clearly determine and define each other. The cultural products of the Normalisation in the form of satire films existed within a kind of “grey zone” with implicit critical messages hidden here and there, mostly under a guise of humour related to everyday life inside a “grey zone”. The

generation of directors during the late socialist time used filmic languages to demonstrate their interactions with spatial-temporal contexts of Normalisation time. The results are the artworks that can be seen as “post-modern” due to the fact that they reject the traditions of politically corrected filmic styles in the context of the socialist state. Despite experiencing state’s efforts to suppress their creativity, these “Normalisation” directors could still attest for their efforts in pursuing confrontations through cinematography and explicit satires (Chytilová), or avoiding it by making subtle confrontations through crazy comedies and everyday life jokes (Lipský and Menzel). All these three directors used their films to condemn the uniformness of the architecture of technocratic phase Sídliště and the urban landscape centrally organized by the state.

All in all, the result of the construction of technocratic phase Sídliště during late socialist Czechoslovakia did not demonstrate the popular desire, nor could it be seen as an expression of public opinion or the kind of housing that people actually wanted to live in. It reflects mainly how the residents (as well as the planners, architects, constructors, and critics) came to terms with the situations that they were powerless to resist. It also reflects the failed aspirations of those who had the power to instigate the societal changes from top-down, of those who genuinely wanted to help improve the housing situations and make positive changes to the lives of ordinary citizens, and of those who thought their ways of doing things were the best ways available (economically, ideologically, and politically). The shortcomings of the actual architectural and engineering practice, and the everyday practice of the residents, were the result of confusions derived from a mixture of many theoretical concepts that seem to only work synthetically on papers and rhetorical discourse, but not being able to be translated into actual practice with expected outcomes. In the end, it appears that the great optimism shown within the aspirations of the high-modernist avant-garde and the post-war socialist ideologues could not be realized within the time that was given to them.

There surely were critics of technocratic phase Sídliště, but no one seemed to listen to their voices. These critics of Sídliště were protagonists of the dissident movement whose work had largely been forgotten when talking about the forces that drove state-socialism to an end. They inserted certain critical values into their own fields of work as a way to express their rejections of the system, to bring in irony a self-reflection and a ceaseless questioning of the contemporary situations and contesting the way in which the system was run and how

subjects were governed. Another way of looking at it is that there existed those who actually listened to these voices, but they did not possess tools (due to the political and economic climate and their marginalized position in society) nor time (before socialism ended in 1989) to actually make a concrete change under the name of socialist Czechoslovakia.



**Figure 53:** A graffiti – block panel house as a rabbit hutch (Prague-Stodůlky-Velká Ohrada, the Czech Republic)<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> Anon., *A graffiti – block panel house as a rabbit hutch* (Prague-Stodůlky-Velká Ohrada, the Czech Republic), Retrieved from: [cs.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soubor:S%C3%ADdli%C5%A1t%C4%9B\\_Velk%C3%A1\\_Ohrada,\\_kr%C3%A1l%C3%ADk%C3%A1rna.jpg](https://cs.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soubor:S%C3%ADdli%C5%A1t%C4%9B_Velk%C3%A1_Ohrada,_kr%C3%A1l%C3%ADk%C3%A1rna.jpg), Accessed 26 July 2019.

## Souhrn

Výtvary poválečných československých prefabrikovaných sídel, které by mohly být nalezeny pouze v komunistické doktríně, byly zakořeněny při vývoji nadnárodních architektonických praktik (přímo související s modernismem a funkcionalismem) od té doby legálních let, přičemž tempo postavení konstrukce je urychlené okolností poválečného socialistického Československa. Za jejich poetickými fasádami artikulovanými avantgardními modernisty existovalo silné odmítnutí tradic jako součást politické rétoriky nově budovaného státu. Meziválečné československé členy kulturního předvoje modernismu výslovně podporovaly komunistickou ideologii a její teorie týkající se pojetí racionalismu a technologického pokroku. To pravděpodobně napomohlo přechodu z meziválečné demokratické první republiky Československa do poválečného socialistického státu s komunistickým sociálním a městským programem, který si hodně půjčil z modernisticko-funkcionalistických konceptů. Nedostatky technokratických sídlišť vybudovaných v 70. a 80. letech a každodenní praxe obyvatel v období pozdního socialismu byly výsledkem zmatků odvozených ze směsi mnoha teoretických konceptů, které podle všeho fungují pouze synteticky na papírech a rétorické diskurzy, ale nelze je převést do skutečné praxe s očekávanými výsledky. Nakonec se zdá, že velký optimismus, který se projevil v aspiracích vysoce modernistické avantgardy a poválečných socialistických ideologů, nemohl být realizován v době, která jim byla dána. V oblasti masového bydlení během poválečného státního socialismu ukázal stát svůj rétorický jazyk, který podporuje kolektivní úsilí. Paradoxně to byl produkt výstavby sídlišť pro všechny v rámci programu „budování socialismu“, který poskytl prostor pro útek občanů do soukromé sféry, protiklad k socialistické představě o kolektivismu. V souvislosti s dobou normalizace existovaly „šedé zóny“ (ne)akce, vyjednávání, kompromisu a negace. Stát se zdál být úspěšný při vstřebávání „sociální kritiky“ Sídliště, která se zaměřila na problematiku „kvality života“ a „psychologické pohody“ do svého vlastního rétorického jazyka a žádala o určitý druh reformovaného socialismu v říší bydlení, a proto opakování rétoriky „socialismu s lidskou tváří“. Navzdory zjevným vnějším obavám o kvalitu života občanů neměly skutečné reakce na sociální kritiku ve formě státních politik dostatek času na to, aby se skutečně projevíly. To vedlo k rozmachu dalších druhů kritiky, které nebyly poháněny těmi zdola (obyvatelé těchto sídlišť, kteří raději unikli do soukromé sféry), ale spíše od intelektuálů a umělců v umělecké sféře. Tito kritici mohli být viděni jako součást disidentského proudu, který



prozkoumal možnosti praxe vyzývající se k omezení architektury, inženýrské praxe a sociálně-politickému paradigmatu pozdního socialismu. Jejich kritika dobře rezonovala s širšími příběhy o neoliberálním přechodu v západní Evropě a postmoderním trendem v oblasti umění a architektury. Českoslovenští umělci interagovali s jejich fyzickou a sociální atmosférou pozdně socialistického Sídliště a vytvářeli umělecká díla, která subjektivně odrážela jejich pohled na současné podmínky. Režiséři promítali atmosféru „normalizace“ ve formě satirických filmů s implicitními kritickými zprávami skrytými pod rouškou humoru související s každodenním životem uvnitř nově postavených / polokonstruovaných „technokratických“ sídlišť postavených v 70. a na začátku 80. let. Tito kritici Sídliště byli protagonisté disidentského hnutí, jejichž práce se do značné míry zapomínala, když mluvíme o silách, které vedly státní socialismus do konce, ale to neznamená, že jejich částí v disidentském hnutí byly zanedbatelné.

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