Getting Rid of an Uncomfortable Past?

Interpreting the Gradual Disappearance of the Architectural Heritage of Socialism in Post-Socialist Czechia

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ABSTRACT

In order to make sense of the gradual disappearance of the 'socialist' architecture in post-socialist Czechia, the thesis focuses on three major public debates that aroused around the controversial demolition of the Ještěd department store in Liberec (2005–2009), Hotel Praha in Prague (2013–2014), and the administrative complex Transgas in Prague's city center (2015–2019). I argue that the prevailing negative image of the communist past manifested itself both in the public and expert discussions, and penetrated even some of the official documents issued by state heritage institutions. This implies that the anti-communist discourse of the 1990s remained influential until the late 2010s – despite frequent claims about its gradual weakening. In the course of time, the architecture of socialism saw increasing interest of the general public as well as scholars, as a result of which the nature of the debate changed considerably. New forms of protests emerged, and young scholars enriched the debate with new types of argumentation. Despite that, however, the last three decades were marked by a gradual elimination of the built heritage of socialism. I conclude that even though this process can hardly be regarded as an act of *active forgetting*, it might eventually influence the way the communist past will be remembered in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

There are nearly forty thousand recognized historic monuments in the Czech Republic. Only some eighty of them, however, originate in the postwar – socialist – period.[1] Moreover, a brief look into the list of the 'youngest' historic monuments compiled by the architect and architecture historian Petr Vorlík suggests that most of the protected postwar buildings were designed in the late 1940s and 1950s,[2] often in the style of the so called socialist realism. The late modernist architecture of the subsequent decades remains largely without legal protection.[3] We find no more than ten items from the 1960s and 1970s on the list of cultural monuments, which, of course, does not mean that there are no architecturally relevant buildings from this period in Czechia.

During the three decades after the Velvet Revolution, many of these buildings lost their initial function, and due to insufficient maintenance are often in a very bad state. As a result, dozens of them were already demolished or underwent a 'destructive' reconstruction.[4] According to the art historian Rostislav Švácha, "the overall result of the last thirty years is unfortunately tragic," especially if we consider the last two decades. "Since 2000, not a single year has passed by without some significant building from the [socialist] period being torn down."[5] Therefore, as another art historian Richard Biegel believes, "something like a Marshall Plan [for the architecture of socialism] is needed"[6] in order not to lose an "entire architectonical layer."[7] If the built heritage of socialism is gradually disappearing, what does it imply about Czech society's attitude towards the communist past in general? Can this process be interpreted

[1] Cited from Richard Biegel, "Nejmladší památky: na úvod nové rubriky," *Dějiny a současnost*, no. 1 (2018): 32.
[2] Petr Vorlík, "Seznam památek – česká poválečná architektura," povalecnaarchitektura.cz, accessed April 19, 2020, http://povalecnaarchitektura.cz/seznam-pamatek/.
[3] Most of the buildings from the 1960s and 1970s does not have the status of cultural monument, which would legally protect them from demolition or insensitive reconstruction.
[4] Petr Vorlík, "Vybrané demolice – česká poválečná architektura," povalecnaarchitektura.cz, accessed April 19, 2020, http://povalecnaarchitektura.cz/vybrane-demolice/.
[5] Rostislav Švácha, interview by Filip Rambousek, August 22, 2019, Praha.
[6] Richard Biegel, interview by Filip Rambousek, August 22, 2019, Praha.
[7] Biegel, "Nejmladší památky," 32.

as part of the "post-communist landscape cleansing"[8] – even though the latest demolition took place in 2019, i.e., thirty years after the fall of communism? What are the dominant narratives of the socialist past and how do they shape the public and expert discussion about the architectural heritage of socialism?

The thesis will address these questions by examining three large public discussions that aroused around three controversial demolitions of postwar architecture in the post-socialist Czechia.[9] The first large-scale demolition of high-quality postwar architecture took place in 2009 and concerned the Ještěd department store in the city of Liberec in northern Bohemia. Despite experts' attempts to save the unique structuralist construction from the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, Ještěd was eventually torn down (unlike its Prague counterpart, the late functionalist Máj department store from the early 1970s, which was declared a cultural monument in 2007 and thus survived).[10] In 2014, i.e. five years after the demolition of Ještěd, yet another architectonically significant building from the socialist period was pulled down, namely Hotel Praha that was built in Prague at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s and served as a luxurious accommodation for prominent foreign guests of the communist party. The latest demolition happened in 2019 in the very center of Prague, just a few meters from the historic building of the National Museum and Wenceslas Square. This time, a unique brutalist complex called Transgas was torn down, more precisely the building of the former gas pipeline control center and the two administrative towers of the then Federal Ministry of Fuel and Energy.

[8] As the cultural geographer Mariusz Czepczyński put it. See Mariusz Czepczyński, *Cultural Landscapes of Post-Socialist Cities: Representation of Powers and Needs* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), especially 109–47.

[9] The selection of the three demolitions is based on an interview with the renowned art historian, professor Rostislav Švácha. He confirmed my assumption that these three demolitions sparked the biggest public discussion and enjoyed the strongest media attention. At the same time, all these buildings deserved to survive and receive the status of cultural monument – not only according to Švácha, but also according to most of the other experts. Švácha, interview, August 22, 2019.

[10] For more details about the two department stores see Rostislav Švácha, "Obchodní dům Máj," *Dějiny a současnost*, no. 3 (2018): 32–33.

Even though each of the three buildings represents different type of architecture, especially from the functional point of view (shopping center, hotel, technology and administration), they also have many common traits. Most importantly, their demolition triggered some form of protest, along with a lively expert and public discussion, both of which were also reflected in the media. Besides that, all of these buildings belong to the most prominent architectural projects of the 1960s and 1970s, which manifested itself not only in the generous funding, but also in their high architectural quality. In a way, Hotel Praha, Ještěd department store and Transgas were all supposed to demonstrate the social and technological advancement of the socialist regime,[11] albeit each of them to somewhat different audience. Furthermore, the Czech ministry of culture decided not to provide these buildings with legal protection and thus de facto authorized their demolition. For these reasons, a thorough analysis of the three selected case studies can help us better understand the process of post-socialist transformation of urban space in Czechia with emphasis on the role of memory politics and nation-building in it.

Thus, the thesis aims to connect two large public debates that are rather separate in the Czech Republic, namely the art history debate on the (insufficient) protection of postwar architecture, and the more general historiographical discussion about the way Czech society has been dealing with the socialist past since the 1990s.

In fact, the topic of the thesis lies at the intersection of several (sub)fields of social sciences, from urban studies and cultural heritage studies to memory studies and nationalism studies. The dominant narratives of the socialist past[12] not only affect the public perception of

[11] Compare with Rostislav Švácha, "Architektura 1958-1970," in *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění VI/1: 1958/2000*, ed. Rostislav Švácha and Marie Platovská (Praha: Academia, 2007), 31; Naďa Goryczková, interview by Filip Rambousek, August 27, 2020, Praha.

[12] I will stick to this terminology in order to avoid the somewhat problematic concept of collective memory. See several contributions in Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, eds., *The Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011); Barry Schwartz, "Rethinking the Concept of Collective Memory," in

architectural and aesthetic qualities of the so-called socialist architecture, they also constitute an important component of the post-socialist identity formation process,[13] which had been to a large extent based on the rejection of socialism. Therefore, the development of the dominant narratives of the socialist past after 1989, primarily in Czechia but also in other countries of the region, will be discussed, too. There is a growing body of academic literature dealing with these issues, often in comparative perspective. This thesis draws mainly on several contributions in two monographs – *Past in the Making*[14] and *Thinking through Transition*[15] – edited by Czech historian Michal Kopeček. Other relevant books on this topic were published by James Mark,[16] and Michael H. Bernhard and Jan Kubik.[17] Besides that, the respective chapter also makes use of several articles dedicated specifically to transitional justice[18] and the process of coming to terms with the socialist past[19] in central and eastern Europe.

Since the thesis aims to analyze how memory politics manifested itself in the post-socialist urban development, scholarly literature in the field of urban geography and other related disciplines was considered as well. The transformation of urban space during socialism

Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies, ed. Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen (London New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 9–21.

[13] After 1989, a "reinterpretation of the pattern of memories, values, symbols, myths and traditions" occurred. This is a definition of national identity formulated by Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: theory, ideology, history* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 18–20.

[14] Michal Kopeček, ed., *Past in the Making: Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008).

[15] Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik, eds., *Thinking through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts, and Intellectual History in East Central Europe after 1989* (Budapest New York: Central European University Press, 2015).

[16] Especially James Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2010).

[17] Michael H. Bernhard and Jan Kubik, eds., *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2014).

[18] Especially Nadya Nedelsky, "Divergent Responses to a Common Past: Transitional Justice in the Czech Republic and Slovakia," *Theory and Society* 33, no. 1 (February 2004): 65–115, https://doi.org/10.1023/B:RYSO.0000021428.22638.e2.

[19] Especially Jiří Přibáň, "Politics of Public Knowledge in Dealing with the Past: Post-Communist Experiences and Some Lessons from the Czech Republic," in *Law and Memory: Towards Legal Governance of History*, ed. Uladzislau Belavusau and Aleksandra Gliszczyńska-Grabias (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 195–215, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316986172.010; Jacques Rupnik, "The Politics of Coming to Terms with the Communist Past. The Czech Case in Central European Perspective," *Tr@nsit Online*, no. 22 (2002), https://www.iwm.at/transit-online/the-politics-of-coming-to-terms-with-the-communist-past-the-czech-case-in.

is well documented, especially in the works of the Czech urban sociologist Jiří Musil,[20] the Hungarian geographer György Enyedi,[21] but also in works of several Anglo-American scholars.[22] All of these scholars tried to find out whether there was something like a socialist city, i.e. in what aspects was the urban development before 1989 unique (usually in comparison with the postwar urban development in western Europe). These considerations have also been intrinsically linked to the subsequent – ongoing – debate on post-socialist city.[23]

More and more academicians study the interplay between memory and urban space, which is also my approach in this thesis. Indeed, the burgeoning field of memory studies has encouraged urban geographers and anthropologists as well as scholars from other disciplines to deal with the spatial dimension of memory. In 2008, a special issue on "collective memory and the politics of urban space" was published in *GeoJournal*.[24] Another special issue came out in 2013, this time in *Nationalities Papers*.[25] Nevertheless, none of them includes empirical cases from Czechia. Most of the studies (in these special issues and elsewhere) focus on rather obvious cases of politically and/or ideologically motivated interventions in countries like

[20] Jiří Musil, "Urbanizace českých zemí a socialismus," in *Zrod velkoměsta: urbanizace českých zemí a Evropa*, ed. Pavla Horská, Eduard Maur, and Jiří Musil (Praha: Paseka, 2002), 237–97.
[21] György Enyedi, "Urbanization under Socialism," in *Cities after Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, ed. Gregory D. Andrusz, Michael Harloe, and Ivan Szelenyi (Oxford; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1996), 100–118.
[22] For instance Kimberly Elman Zarecor, "What Was So Socialist about the Socialist City? Second World Urbanity in Europe," *Journal of Urban History* 44, no. 1 (January 2018): 95–117, https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144217710229; Sonia Hirt, "Whatever Happened to the (Post)Socialist City?," *Cities* 32 (July 2013): S29–38, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2013.04.010; David M. Smith, "The Socialist City," in *Cities after Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, ed. Gregory D. Andrusz, Michael Harloe, and Ivan Szelenyi (Oxford ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1996), 70–99.
[23] Sonia Hirt, Slavomíra Ferenčuhová, and Tauri Tuvikene, "Conceptual Forum: The 'Post-Socialist' City," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57, no. 4–5 (September 2, 2016): 497–520, https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2016.1271345; Luděk Sýkora and Stefan Bouzarovski, "Multiple Transformations: Conceptualising the Post-Communist Urban Transition," *Urban Studies* 49, no. 1 (January 2012): 43–60, https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098010397402; Luděk Sýkora, "Changes in the Internal Spatial Structure of Post-Communist Prague," *GeoJournal* 49, no. 1 (1999): 79–89.
[24] GeoJournal Special Issue "Collective memory and the politics of urban space," 2008. https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40050917 (accessed March 3, 2020).
[25] Nationalities Papers Special Issue "From socialist to post-socialist cities," 2013. https://tandfonline.com/toc/cnap20/41/4?nav=tocList (accessed March 3, 2020).

Hungary,[26] Romania,[27] Poland[28] and Macedonia.[29] Only a few comparative studies[30] and monographs[31] discuss examples of post-socialist urban transformations in the Czech Republic.

Thus, the existing literature has two major limitations. Firstly, it largely omits empirical cases of urban transformations in post-socialist Czechia. And secondly, it concentrates mostly on monuments, memorials, and/or new prominent governmental projects, i.e. highly symbolical objects loaded with controversial historical meanings. In this thesis, I will explore the potential of looking at politically less salient yet still relevant and architecturally significant buildings from the socialist period. The public and expert discussion concerning some of the most controversial demolitions of such buildings can, as I will argue, provide us with valuable insights into the process of post-socialist urban transformation and the role of memory politics in it. By embedding the thorough analysis of the three cases into the framework of post-socialist

[26] Emilia Palonen, "Millennial Politics of Architecture: Myths and Nationhood in Budapest," *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 4 (July 2013): 536–51, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2012.743509; Emilia Palonen, "The City-Text in Post-Communist Budapest: Street Names, Memorials, and the Politics of Commemoration," *GeoJournal* 73, no. 3 (November 2008): 219–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-008-9204-2.

[27] Duncan Light and Craig Young, "Urban Space, Political Identity and the Unwanted Legacies of State Socialism: Bucharest's Problematic Centru Civic in the Post-Socialist Era," *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 4 (July 2013): 515–35, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2012.743512; Duncan Light and Craig Young, "Political Identity, Public Memory and Urban Space: A Case Study of 'Parcul Carol I,' Bucharest from 1906 to the Present," *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 9 (November 2010): 1453–78, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2010.515792; Duncan Light and Craig Young, "Reconfiguring Socialist Urban Landscapes: The 'Left-over' Spaces of State-Socialism in Bucharest," *Human Geographies – Journal of Studies and Research in Human Geography* 4, no. 1 (2010): 5–16.

[28] Michał Murawski, *The Palace Complex: A Stalinist Skyscraper, Capitalist Warsaw, and a City Transfixed* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2019); Craig Young and Sylvia Kaczmarek, "The Socialist Past and Postsocialist Urban Identity in Central and Eastern Europe: The Case of Łódź, Poland," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 15, no. 1 (January 2008): 53–70, https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776407081275; Ewa Stańczyk, "Remaking National Identity: Two Contested Monuments in Post-Communist Poland," *Central Europe* 11, no. 2 (November 2013): 127–42, https://doi.org/10.1179/1479096313Z.00000000015.

[29] Ivana Nikolovska, "Skopje 2014: The Role of Government in the Spatial Politics of Collective Memory," in *Materializing Identities in Socialist and Post-Socialist Cities*, ed. Jaroslav Ira and Jiři Janáč (Praha: Karolinum, 2018), 116–42; Fabio Mattioli, "Unchanging Boundaries: The Reconstruction of Skopje and the Politics of Heritage," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 20, no. 6 (August 18, 2014): 599–615, https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2013.818569.

[30] Arnold Bartetzky, "Changes in the Political Iconography of East Central European Capitals after 1989 (Berlin, Warsaw, Prague, Bratislava)," *International Review of Sociology* 16, no. 2 (July 2006): 451–69, https://doi.org/10.1080/03906700600709434; Sara Jean Tomczuk, "Contention, Consensus, and Memories of Communism: Comparing Czech and Slovak Memory Politics in Public Spaces, 1993–2012," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 57, no. 3 (June 2016): 105–26, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020715216658187.

[31] Mariusz Czepczyński, *Cultural Landscapes of Post-Socialist Cities: Representation of Powers and Needs* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008); Alfrun Kliems et al., eds., *The Post-Socialist City: Continuity and Change in Urban Space and Imagery* (Berlin: Jovis, 2010); Cynthia Paces, *Prague Panoramas: National Memory and Sacred Space in the Twentieth Century*, Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies (Pittsburgh, Pa: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

nation-building, the thesis provides the debate on post-socialist city with new empirical data from a country that has been rather neglected in this kind of research. It will therefore contribute to a more nuanced knowledge of the post-socialist urban development with regards to the regional specificities. Prague, to give an example, represents quite a distinctive (historical) built environment in comparison with, say, Warsaw.

In addition to the academic literature mentioned earlier, the theses rests on three monographs dedicated to the three demolished buildings, that is the Ještěd department store,[32] Hotel Praha[33] and Transgas.[34] All of them were published rather recently (2019), which also indicates the growing public interest in postwar architecture in the Czech Republic. Even though these books were extremely helpful in reconstructing the (hi)stories of the three buildings, including the circumstances of their demolition, they do not systematically address the dimension of memory politics. The same is also true for the newspaper articles and other media reactions related to the three demolitions.[35]

Therefore, in order to conceptually anchor the analysis, it was necessary to turn to scholars dealing with the urban (spatial) dimension of memory. Perhaps the most substantial contribution in this regard represents the 2008 comparative study by the polish cultural geographer Mariusz Czepczyński who introduced a chronological three-stage model of "post-communist landscape cleansing": *separation*, *transition*, and *reincorporation*.[36] The first phase consist of "sorting out the 'good' and 'bad'" and is followed by elimination of unwanted symbols, forms, and functions.[37] This initial stage concerned mainly statues, monuments, and

[32] Jiří Jiroutek, ed., *Už nejdu do Ještědu = I no longer shop at Ještěd* (Liberec: Fenomén Ještěd s.r.o., 2019).
[33] Pavel Karous, ed., *Hotel Praha* (Praha: BiggBoss; Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová v Praze; Galerie výtvarného umění v Chebu, 2019).
[34] Naďa Goryczková, ed., *Transgas: areál řídicí ústředny Tranzitního plynovodu a budova FMPE v Praze: historie, architektura, památkový potenciál* (Praha: Národní památkový ústav, 2019).
[35] Despite this limitation, I often cite various commentaries and other contributions in order to illustrate the media coverage of the three cases.
[36] Czepczyński, *Cultural Landscapes of Post-Socialist Cities*, 113–37.
[37] Ibid., 115.

other visible symbols of the overthrown regime, "only a few iconic buildings were mimetically communist enough to be destroyed."[38] The next stage is characterized by a more gradual process in which the "old landscape is being re-interpreted and de-contextualized" and step by step replaced by a newly constructed landscape.[39] From here on, the architectural heritage of socialism comes to the fore. The last phase that "might have just begun in Central Europe,"[40] as Czepczyński wrote in 2008, was supposed to be marked by a reincorporation of the socialist material heritage into the new landscape. This should be possible because old symbols have already lost their ideological power and "the division between 'old' and 'new' becomes insignificant."[41] The architecture of socialist realism is becoming a tourist attraction, many "communist theme pubs and bars" are being opened, and even the architecture of the 1960s and 1970s receives more and more attention and recognition, explained Czepczyński.[42]

This was quite an optimistic assessment that might have been influenced by the declaration of the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw a cultural monument in 2007. It is true that there is an increasing awareness of the qualities of postwar architecture, which also manifested itself in the growing size of the protests[43] and the accompanying expert and public discussion.[44] At the same time, however, this awareness was not strong enough to prevent several architectonically valuable buildings from demolition. Thus, from the perspective of

[38] Ibid., 123. Czepczyński mentions the demolition of the Dimitrov mausoleum in Sofia in 1999 and the demolition of the Palace of the Republic in Berlin in 2006–2008. See ibid., 123–125.
[39] Ibid., 129–32. The competing interpretations of the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw or the difficult process of appropriation of the socialist housing estates are just two of many examples of the "transitional 'landscape[s] in between,'" as Czepczyński calls it. Ibid., 130–32.
[40] Ibid., 132.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 132–137.
[43] From one hundred protesters in 2013 to two hundred protesters in 2019. Čeněk Třeček, "Stovka Lidí Protestovala Proti Plánovanému Bourání Hotelu Praha," iDNES.cz, July 9, 2013, https://www.idnes.cz/praha/zpravy/demonstrace-proti-bourani-hotelu-praha.A130709_202845_praha-zpravy_cen; Ondřej Šebestík, "Půjde Transgas definitivně k zemi? Praha nemá na odkup dost peněz, asi dvě stě lidí protestovalo," Radio Wave, February 21, 2019, https://wave.rozhlas.cz/pujde-transgas-definitivne-k-zemi-praha-nema-na-odkup-dost-penez-asi-dve-ste-7766967.
[44] In contrast to that, in Budapest, an architectonically valuable building from the early 1960s – Gyógyászati Segédeszközök Gyára – „disappeared [in 2013] without any echo." András Ferkai to Filip Rambousek, April 23, 2020.

heritage preservation, the reality of the last 10–15 years does not give much reasons for optimism, especially when it comes to the architecture of the 1960s and 1970s. With regards to the time frame, the thesis begins where Mariusz Czepczyński left off, that is in the 2000s. However, by focusing primarily on large-scale demolitions of 'socialist' architecture, it in a way challenges the idea of "reincorporation" that was supposed to characterize the situation from ca. 2008 on.

The analytical part of the thesis draws on three analytical categories suggested by Dwyer and Alderman.[45] The first category understands "memorial landscapes" as *texts* and emphasizes their symbolic meaning that usually changes over time.[46] The second category, *arena*, enables to analyze "the political struggles and debates that frequently revolve around the representation of the past."[47] The third approach focuses on the *performative* dimension of memorials, enabling to study "the ways in which memorial landscapes serve as a stage (…) for a wide range of performances."[48] Despite being originally designed for the study of memorials and monuments, these analytical categories can also be applied – as I will demonstrate in the third chapter – to analyze other types of disputed material heritage, including architecturally valuable, large-sized buildings like Ještěd department store, Hotel Praha or Transgas.

Besides that, Aleida Assmann's concept of *active* and *passive forgetting*[49] will be applied when interpreting the fate of 'socialist' architecture in post-socialist Czechia. If there is an intention of the state or some other actor to destroy substantial part of the architectural heritage of socialism, then we could regard it as an act of *active forgetting*.[50]

[45] Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman, "Memorial Landscapes: Analytic Questions and Metaphors," *GeoJournal* 73, no. 3 (November 2008): 165–78, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-008-9201-5.
[46] Ibid., 169–71.
[47] Ibid., 171.
[48] Ibid., 173–175.
[49] Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 334–37.
[50] Assmann, 334.

Based on these considerations, the thesis aims to answer the following research questions.

1) To what extent and in what ways have the competing narratives of the socialist past influenced the three major debates on the architectural heritage of socialism in post-socialist Czechia (Ještěd Department Store, 2005–2009; Hotel Praha, 2013–2014; Transgas, 2015–2019)?
2) Why and how have the debates changed over time (ca. 2005–2019)?
3) What do the findings imply about the process of coming to terms with the socialist past in post-socialist Czechia?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to go beyond the existing secondary literature listed above. Most importantly, sixteen semi-structured interviews with art historians (seven experts), preservationists (five people from various institutions of heritage preservation), and activists (four people actively involved in the debates) have been conducted. The basic idea was to include both *official* and *unofficial* actors,[51] that is people representing state institutions, along with independent experts and activists.[52] At the same time, experts with different attitudes towards postwar architecture were interviewed, i.e. not only those who supported the preservation of (some of) the three buildings such as Rostislav Švácha, Petr Vorlík, Klára Brůhová, Veronika Vicherková or Milena Bartlová, but also art historians are more skeptical about the architecture of socialism, especially Petr Kratochvíl and Zdeněk Lukeš.[53]

As for the representatives of heritage institutions, I interviewed the director of the National Heritage Institute Naděžda Goryczková, her colleague Matyáš Kracík who focuses on postwar architecture, the head of the Department of Heritage Preservation at the Ministry of

[51] In a similar way as Sara Jean Tomczuk, "Contention, Consensus, and Memories of Communism."
[52] There is often quite a fine line between experts and activists. Most of the interviewed experts were actively involved in some of the debates and tried to influence the public and expert opinion.
[53] These are the seven art historians I have interviewed. I have identified and contacted most of them myself, the only exception being prof. Petr Kratochvíl who was recommended to me by prof. Švácha.

Culture Jiří Vajčner, together with one of his colleagues Jiří Slavík,[54] and a Liberec-based (former) preservationist Jiří Křížek.[55] Moreover, I also conducted interviews with three activists, two of whom were actively involved in the protests against the demolition of Hotel Praha (the sculptor Pavel Karous and the then student Kateřina Krejčová). The third activist, the art history student Lukáš Veverka, co-organized the protests around Transgas. Last but not least, I also talked to the Liberec-based curator Luďek Lukuvka who closely followed the debates on the Ještěd department store.

The interviews were recorded between July 2020 and February 2021, mostly in person. Each of them took ca. one hour.[56] Since they were all semi-structured interviews, I only had a few topics to discuss but I could ask additional questions. In general, I was interested in 1) the interviewees' perception of the three demolitions, 2) their own role in the debate(s), 3) their understanding of the relationship between architecture and the political regime it was build it, 4) their perception of the three expert and public debates (changes in time, argumentation, role of memory politics, media coverage etc.), 5) their assessment of the institutional protection of postwar architecture in the Czech Republic.

Even though the sixteen interviewees certainly do not represent the full spectrum of stakeholders,[57] they do provide us with an excellent insight into the debates, while displaying the variety of opinions and arguments that dominated the expert as well as the public discussions. In addition, they also enabled me to better understand the complexity of power

[54] Unfortunately, I was not allowed to record the interview so I only made a few notes.
[55] Altogether, five preservationists were interviewed. I also – repeatedly – contacted the Department of Heritage Preservation at the Prague City Council but never received an answer.
[56] Some of them were even longer, approximately 75 minutes. The only exception was the interview with Matyáš Kracík, which took only some 25 minutes (due to his busy schedule at that time).
[57] Especially the representatives of the development companies are missing as well as the architects of the buildings. However, their opinions could be easily found elsewhere – in interviews, press releases etc.

relations in the three cases and helped me to reconstruct the array of civic activities with much more precision.[58]

The text of the thesis is divided into three chapters. The first one deals with the nation-building process in the post-socialist Czechia with emphasis on the role of memory politics. More precisely, it identifies the dominant narratives of the socialist past and analyzes their changes over the last three decades, often in comparison with other central and eastern European countries. The next section aims to capture the changing meaning of urban space (and architecture) from the early postwar period until this day – in order to explain the broader political context in which the three buildings had been constructed, and to outline the far-reaching changes (and challenges) that the post-1989 transformation process brought to the further development of cities, including the domain of heritage preservation. Finally, the three demolitions are thoroughly analyzed, starting from a brief history of the buildings, including the changes of their symbolic meaning over time *(text)*, to the "political struggles and debates"[59] they triggered *(arena)*, especially in the last years before their demolition, to the protests, demonstrations, and other performative acts that took place in reaction to the intended demolition *(performance)*. The subsequent discussion section compares the three public debates with each other and identifies the connection(s) between the three demolitions and memory politics. The final conclusion briefly summarizes the main findings.

[58] According to my knowledge, I am the first person who tried to systematically reconstruct the protest movements that emerged around Hotel Praha and Transgas.
[59] Dwyer and Alderman, "Memorial Landscapes," 171.

1 Constructing the Narrative(s) of the Communist Past after 1989

1.1 The 1990s: The Rejection of the Communist Past as a Source of Political Legitimacy

Every change of a political regime is accompanied by a radical break with the recent past. This was also true, although with varying intensity and timing, for the newly democratic states that emerged in central and eastern Europe after the collapse of communism in 1989. The so-called decommunization took place at different levels, from symbolical and rhetorical to legal and political, and represented an important source of legitimacy for the post-1989 democracies. In Czechoslovakia, respectively Czech Republic, this process started very soon, immediately after the Velvet Revolution. Some of the first laws provided the rehabilitation of former political prisoners and other victims of the communist regime, as well as the restitution of property confiscated after February 1948. The latter provision constituted one of the pillars of privatization and thus also of the overall economic transformation.[60]

Perhaps the most problematic tool of transitional justice concerned the exclusion of former high-ranking party members, collaborators of secret police and other prominent officials of the communist regime from acquiring leading positions in the government, army, state-owned enterprises, public service media, judiciary etc.[61] The Czechoslovak parliament adopted the so-called *lustration law* as early as 1991, rendering Czechoslovakia the first country in the region to pass such legislation.[62] Slovak nationalists, however, did not support the law. According to some analysts, the growing tensions over decommunization contributed to the

[60] Michal Kopeček, "Von der Geschichtspolitik zur Erinnerung als politischer Sprache: Der tschechische Umgang mit der kommunistischen Vergangenheit nach 1989," in *Geschichtspolitik in Europa Seit 1989: Deutschland, Frankreich Und Polen im internationalen Vergleich*, ed. Etienne François et al. (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013), 360.
[61] Nedelsky, "Divergent Responses to a Common Past," 70–71.
[62] Nedelsky, 65.

dissolution of the common state in 1993.[63] Since the break-up, each of the two countries followed a different path with regards to transitional justice. Whereas Czechs repeatedly extended the effect of the lustration law, Slovaks withdrew from lustrations after the 1991 law expired in 1996.[64]

Several scholars suggested that the divergence might be, at least partly, explained by a different degree of legitimacy of the post-1968 regime in the two parts of the country, which stems from the divergent outcome of the Prague Spring – seen from Prague and Bratislava, respectively. In fact, the defeat of the reform process was somewhat less harmful for Slovaks since one of their main requirements, namely federalization of Czechoslovakia, had been eventually carried out in 1969. Thanks to this, and due to some other factors such as relatively lower level of repressions and higher level of co-optation, people living in the Slovak part of the federation could better identify with what has been classified in literature as "a combination of national-accommodative and patrimonial regimes."[65] The relatively better, or at least less painful, experience of Slovaks with the *normalization*-era communism helps explain the weaker demand for transitional justice in the post-communist Slovakia.[66]

By contrast, the Czechs' perception of the post-1968 communist regime was much more critical, for all the democratization efforts had been thwarted by the Warsaw-pact tanks, and the subsequent purges conducted by the emerging "bureaucratic-authoritarian" regime affected the Czech population more severely than the Slovak.[67] The relatively "high levels of repression, lower levels of co-optation, and ideological rigidity"[68] in the Czech part of the federation also

[63] Rupnik, "The Politics of Coming to Terms with the Communist Past. The Czech Case in Central European Perspective."
[64] Nedelsky, "Divergent Responses to a Common Past," 65–66.
[65] Nedelsky, 86.
[66] Nedelsky, 82–88; Rupnik, "The Politics of Coming to Terms with the Communist Past. The Czech Case in Central European Perspective."
[67] Nedelsky, "Divergent Responses to a Common Past," 82–85.
[68] Nedelsky, 85.

provoked a counterreaction, namely the establishment of Charter 77, civic initiative that was strongly dominated by Czech intellectuals, and whose "impact in Slovakia was negligible."[69] All these factors contributed to a more negative image of communism in post-1989 Czechia and created a fertile ground for a continuation of the firm decommunization policies far beyond 1993.

These efforts culminated in July 1993 in the adoption by the Czech parliament of the *Act on the Illegality of the Communist Regime*,[70] which declared the entire period of the communist rule "criminal, illegitimate and despicable." It further stated that the communist party, its leadership and members were responsible for the "systematic destruction of traditional values of European civilization," as well as for the "destruction of traditional principles of property right." The importance of the law lies predominantly in its symbolic meaning and the overall tone, which was, according to the historian Michal Kopeček, based "on a simplified theory of totalitarianism."[71] In this respect, the law has foreshadowed some of the key argumentation patterns that kept reappearing through all major discussions about the communist past thenceforth. First, it construed the *ancien régime* as a forty-years long uninterrupted era of totalitarian rule. Even the relatively short but significant period of liberalization in the late 1960s had been singled out, because it did not fit into the monolithic (totalitarian) notion of the recent past. Second, the law reinforced the idea that communism had been imposed on Czechs from outside and should be thus seen as a "historical aberration from the supposedly natural path of Czech and European history."[72] Such interpretation is not only

[69] Nedelsky, 83.
[70] The „Act on the Illegality of the Communist Regime and on Resistance Against It," is accessible online. "Zákon ze dne 9. července 1993 o protiprávnosti komunistického režimu a o odporu proti němu," 1993, https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/normy/sb198-1993.pdf.
[71] Michal Kopeček, "Czech Republic: From the Politics of History to Memory as Political Language," *Cultures of History Forum*, December 2, 2013, p. 3, https://doi.org/10.25626/0011.
[72] Ibid.

inaccurate but also dangerous since it gives no "incentive to examine the inner sources and responsibilities"[73] that enabled the establishment and maintenance of the communist rule.

Two years later, in 1995, two separate institutions merged into the newly established *Office for the Documentation and Investigation of the Crimes of Communism*,[74] which played an important role, especially in the documentation of crimes committed by the political and bureaucratic apparatus of the communist state.[75] At the end of the 1990s, however, the office gradually lost influence, which can be partly attributed to the broader social and political context of that time, primarily to the formation of a new social-democratic minority government in 1998.[76] Historians pointed out that at about the same time, the initial anti-communist consensus, one of the pillars of the democratic regime's legitimacy, had been replaced by a plurality of interpretations represented by different political camps. Birgit Hofmann speaks of "a growing political struggle over history,"[77] while Kopeček describes the process as a shift "from the politics of history to memory as political language."[78] Nevertheless, in the following years it became apparent that the "right-wing, anti-communist" view will be the most influential one.[79] At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the process of coming to terms with the socialist past in Czechia during the 1990s was quite unique. According to the political scientist and expert on the region's modern history Jacques Rupnik, "nowhere in post-Soviet

[73] Rupnik, "The Politics of Coming to Terms with the Communist Past. The Czech Case in Central European Perspective."
[74] For further details see Kopeček, "Von der Geschichtspolitik zur Erinnerung als politischer Sprache: Der tschechische Umgang mit der kommunistischen Vergangenheit nach 1989," 363–64.
[75] See also Kopeček, "Czech Republic: From the Politics of History to Memory as Political Language."
[76] Kopeček, "Von der Geschichtspolitik zur Erinnerung als politischer Sprache: Der tschechische Umgang mit rer kommunistischen Vergangenheit nach 1989," 364.
[77] Birgit Hofmann, "'Prager Frühling' Und 'Samtene Revolution': Narrative Des Realsozialismus in Der Tschechischen Nationalen Identitätskonstruktion," in *Nationen Und Ihre Selbstbilder: Postdiktatorische Gesellschaften in Europa*, ed. Regina Fritz, Carola Sachse, and Edgar Wolfrum (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008), 183.
[78] Kopeček, "Von Der Geschichtspolitik Zur Erinnerung Als Politischer Sprache: Der Tschechische Umgang Mit Der Kommunistischen Vergangenheit Nach 1989". Compare with Kopeček, "Czech Republic: From the Politics of History to Memory as Political Language."
[79] Kopeček, "Von Der Geschichtspolitik Zur Erinnerung Als Politischer Sprache: Der Tschechische Umgang Mit Der Kommunistischen Vergangenheit Nach 1989," 357.

East-Central Europe has decommunization (both legal and rhetorical) gone further than in Czechoslovakia (and later in the Czech Republic)."[80]

The peculiarity of the Czechs' consensual and firm stance towards the communist past is particularly striking when contrasted with the political struggles over history in Poland and Hungary. These struggles, however, started only by the mid-1990s as a reaction of conservative parties to the ex-communists' return to power in 1993 (Poland) and 1994 (Hungary).[81] In these two countries the rejection of the communist past could not be carried out in such a vigorous way and so quickly as in the Czech Republic since former communists played a crucial role in the successful transition to democracy in 1989. It was exactly the close cooperation of the opposition leaders with the (reform) communists what the evolving anti-communist right criticized the most. Political parties like Solidarity Electoral Action in Poland or Fidesz in Hungary did not accept the liberal reading of 1989 which saw the peaceful transition "as something to be celebrated."[82] They rather viewed the round table negotiations "as a betrayal of earlier struggles against the regime,"[83] because it did not prevent ex-communists from maintaining political and economic power.

Indeed, the first two decades after 1989 saw several governments dominated by communist successor parties. In addition, former communists also became presidents in both countries. For this reason, the new conservatives often spoke of an "unfinished revolution" (a term coined by historian James Mark[84]) and called for its completion – in the form of purging ex-communists from public life. The representatives of the post-communist left opposed this view and offered their own interpretation of 1989 in which they emphasized their active

[80] Rupnik, "The Politics of Coming to Terms with the Communist Past. The Czech Case in Central European Perspective."
[81] James Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2010), 6.
[82] Mark, 2.
[83] Mark, 25.
[84] Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution*.

contribution to the successful democratic transition.[85] In short, there has been a long-standing dispute over the legacy of communism and the nature of the transition to democracy. A dispute that amounts to one of the key political cleavages in the post-communist Poland and Hungary with parties like Law and Justice or Fidesz aiming to 'complete' the 'unfinished revolution.' In the Czech Republic, the most successful conservative political force, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), could not challenge the post-1989 settlement in such a decisive way as its Polish or Hungarian counterparts since ODS itself played a substantial role in the (neo)liberal transition immediately after 1989.[86] Moreover, the political power of former communists remained rather limited – regardless the continuous presence of an unreformed communist successor party (KSČM) in the parliament. Despite these differences, Czechia too experienced a "conservative political turn of the 2000s" marked by a "re-politization of memory."[87] It was furthermore suggested that except for the relative popularity of the KSČM, the so-called *Ostalgia*, no matter how innocent, also contributed to the growing conviction among conservatives that the population needs to be better educated about the criminal nature of the communist regime.[88]

1.2 The 2000s: The Institutionalization of Anti-Communism?

It soon became apparent that the efforts of conservatives to criminalize communism and exclude former communists from politics by means of law, for instance through lustrations, is a lengthy and not a very successful undertaking. Therefore, the political struggle over history

[85] Mark, 1–26; See also James Mark et al., "1989 After 1989: Remembering the End of State Socialism in East-Central Europe," in *Thinking Through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts, and Intellectual History in East Central Europe After 1989*, ed. Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik (Central European University Press, 2015), 463–504, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7829/j.ctt19z3941.18.
[86] Kopeček, "Czech Republic: From the Politics of History to Memory as Political Language," 8–9.
[87] Kopeček, 8–9.
[88] Kopeček, "Von der Geschichtspolitik zur Erinnerung als politischer Sprache," 372.

gradually spilled over to the cultural sphere by the end of the 1990s. The best-known manifestation of this process were the newly established institutes of national memory, museums and terror sites, whose main aim was to shape and control "the collective memory of the communist past and the transition."[89] Even though most of these institutes claimed to be following the German example of the so-called Gauck-Behörde,[90] it was not completely true since their aims went much further than to merely process, store, and make available the records of the secret service. First, besides the archival function, they also pursued research and educational activities. The Polish Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), the oldest institute of this kind in the region established in 1998, even acquired competencies to investigate crimes "against the Polish nation."[91] Second, unlike its alleged German model, these institutes focused their activities not only on the communist past, but also on Second World War. And finally, as the establishment of these institutes was initiated and carried out by the then governing (conservative) coalitions, they proved to be very fragile when exposed to political pressures.

As a result, even if the institutes portrayed themselves as independent and apolitical, they have been frequently accused of serving political interests. Many historians criticized the faulty construction and functioning of the national memory institutes, which found expression in the "emotionally charged nationalist rhetoric and black-and-white historical meta-narrative."[92] Moreover, the permanent (threat of) political pressure and the prevalence of nationalist frameworks is often accompanied by a tendency of these institutes "to present themselves as all-encompassing centers of historical understanding of the communist

[89] Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution*, 31.
[90] Nicknamed after Joachim Gauck, the first Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic (appointed in October 1990).
[91] Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution*, 48–49; compare with Michal Kopeček, "In Search of 'National Memory': The Politics of History, Nostalgia and the Historiography of Communism in the Czech Republic and East Central Europe," in *Past in the Making: Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989*, ed. Michal Kopeček (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), 88.
[92] Kopeček, "In Search of 'National Memory,'" 88.

dictatorship."[93] Reservations of this kind could be heard also with regards to the Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes established in 2007. Its critics find it highly problematic that the Czech memory institute, too, claims to possess the 'only' correct interpretation of history. In reality, however, it offers a very incomplete picture of the communist past, overemphasizing the repressive nature of the regime, while omitting other important aspects of life before 1989 such as the late socialist consumerism or the limited freedom in the private sphere, both of which were granted to the citizens by the socialist state in order to bolster its legitimacy.[94]

In addition to the efforts of the memory institutes in their respective countries, they have also been cooperating at the international level in order to challenge the EU's dominant memory regime centered on the commemoration of Holocaust, with the aim of eventually replacing it with a memory regime "based on the equalization of communist and Nazi crimes and on the externalization of the communist experience."[95] Such regional initiatives further underline the predominance of "crimes-centered narrative of the communist past" inspired by "a usable theory of totalitarianism"[96] – at least in the post-communist part of Europe. The Czech Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes serves as a perfect example since its founders decided to put the contested term 'totalitarian' right into the name of the new institute. In doing so, the legislators followed the tone of the 1993 *Act on the Illegality of the Communist Regime* that was characteristic of "the political legitimating discourse of the early 1990s."[97]

[93] Michal Kopeček and Matěj Spurný, "The History and Memory of Communism in the Czech Republic," *Heinrich Böll Stiftung Prague* (blog), March 9, 2010, https://www.cz.boell.org/en/2014/03/24/history-and-memory-communism-czech-republic-democracy.
[94] Kopeček and Spurný.
[95] Zoltán Dujisin, "Post-Communist Europe: On the Path to a Regional Regime of Remembrance?," in *Thinking Through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts, and Intellectual History in East Central Europe After 1989*, ed. Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik (Central European University Press, 2015), 554, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7829/j.ctt19z3941.21.
[96] Dujisin, 576.
[97] Kopeček, "In Search of 'National Memory,'" 91. Strictly speaking, Hungary is one of the few countries that does not have such memory institute. However, the 2002 established House of Terror fulfils the same role. See

1.3 The 2010s: Fading Away of (Anti)Communism from the Political Discourse?

When it comes to the importance of the communist past in the political discourse of the last decade, there is a stark contrast between Poland and Hungary on the one side, and Czech Republic on the other. Whereas in the Czech Republic, the topic has already lost most of its salience and is "gradually moving to the margins of political debate,"[98] Orbán's Hungary and Kaczyński's Poland saw a resurgence of memory politics related to communism. To mention at least the most striking examples, the Law and Justice-led government introduced a 'street de-communization law' in 2016 and, in the following year, further broadened its scope to communist-era monuments.[99] As a result, "almost weekly, crowds gather in Poland's towns and cities to watch a local communist landmark dismantled."[100] In Hungary, Orbán tried to symbolically complete the 'unfinished revolution' by means of constitutional law: the preamble of the new constitution (called Fundamental Law) adopted in 2011 literally excludes the period between 1944 and 1989 from Hungarian history.[101] Article U adopted as part of the Fourth Amendment to the Fundamental Law in 2013 goes even further and, according to legal expert Gábor Halmai, "revisits the settlements made during the immediate transition from communism to democracy."[102]

Dujisin, "Post-Communist Europe: On the Path to a Regional Regime of Remembrance?," 570–71; Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution*, 61–68, 74–79.

[98] Kristina Andělová, "The Sound of Silence: How Czechs Commemorated the 50th Anniversary of the Prague Spring," October 30, 2018, https://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/debates/czech/the-sound-of-silence-how-czechs-commemorated-the-50th-anniversary-of-the-prague-spring/.

[99] Uladzislau Belavusau, "The Rise of Memory Laws in Poland," *Security and Human Rights* 29, no. 1–4 (December 12, 2018): 40–41, https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02901011.

[100] Matthew Luxmoore, "Poles Apart: The Bitter Conflict over a Nation's Communist History," *The Guardian*, July 13, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jul/13/poles-apart-the-bitter-conflict-over-a-nations-history-poland-monuments-communism-soviet-union.

[101] For further details see Gábor Halmai, "Memory Politics in Hungary: Political Justice without Rule of Law," *Verfassungsblog*, January 10, 2018, https://verfassungsblog.de/memory-politics-in-hungary-political-justice-without-rule-of-law/; Miklós Könczöl, "Dealing with the Past in and around the Fundamental Law of Hungary," in *Law and Memory*, ed. Uladzislau Belavusau and Aleksandra Gliszczyńska-Grabias (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 246–62, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316986172.013.

[102] Halmai, "Memory Politics in Hungary."

The Czech experience was quite different, because the main challenger of the post-1989 democratic system, the oligarch Andrej Babiš, has been electorally less successful than his Polish or Hungarian counterparts, and his political rhetoric is ideologically less loaded. He is mostly labeled as "centrist or technocratic populist."[103] Morover, he has been enjoying considerable public popularity despite being a member of the communist party and a collaborator of the state security in the 1980s: as if the communist past did not play a role anymore – at least for a substantial part of the electorate. Indeed, after the 2013 parliamentary election in which his ANO movement got nearly 19 % of the votes, he became a deputy prime minister of a coalition government led by social democrats. In 2017 Babiš eventually won the election and became prime minister of a minority government whose existence relies on a support of the unreformed communist party. However, it would be inaccurate to claim that the process of dealing with the communist past ended with the election of a former secret service collaborator as prime minister. It rather implies that pointing out at somebody's pre-1989 past no longer represents a viable political strategy.[104] Furthermore, such interpretation fails to take account of Babiš's efforts to get rid of this stigma by legal means (since 2013),[105] as well as his later (2019) attempt to acknowledge (and apologize for) his conformity and lack of courage before 1989.[106] In any case, Babiš's popularity poses a serious challenge to the assumption about the dominance of the anti-communist discourse in the Czech Republic. In fact, it seems that roughly with the 2008 financial crisis, concerns about history were overshadowed by

[103] Robert Anderson, "Summer Strife Puts Czech PM's Populism to the Test," *Balkan Insight*, July 15, 2019, https://balkaninsight.com/2019/07/15/summer-strife-puts-czech-pms-populism-to-the-test/.
[104] Andělová, "The Sound of Silence."
[105] Přibáň, "Politics of Public Knowledge in Dealing with the Past," 196.
[106] In his speech on the 30th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in 2019, Babiš stated: "As you surely know, I used to be a member of the Communist Party. I am not proud of this. As I have said many times, I was not as brave or engaged as Havel." See Andrej Babiš, "Speech of Prime Minister Andrej Babiš on the 30th Anniversary of 17 November 1989 | Government of the Czech Republic," November 17, 2019, https://www.vlada.cz/en/clenove-vlady/premier/speeches/speech-of-prime-minister-andrej-babis-on-the-30th-anniversary-of-17-november-1989-178111/.

concerns about the present, which found expression in "a wave of disillusionment with the economic and social developments (…) and a widespread mistrust of liberal democracy."[107]

This change of perspective also manifested itself in the ways in which important anniversaries related to communism have been commemorated. Whereas during the 1990s, the 'victorious' Velvet Revolution could be easily celebrated by all, and the logic of the celebrations usually rested on a simplified dichotomy between the "criminal and barbarous" past and the democratic present,[108] the round anniversaries have, in the course of time, become a welcome opportunity for citizens to express their dissatisfaction with the current political situation. In November 2009, for instance, various students' initiatives and other civil society actors, drawing on the tradition of anti-politics, "framed a moral critique of post-communist Czech democracy."[109] Ten years later, in 2019, more than two hundred thousand people (in a country of ten million) gathered in Prague to protest against the then prime minister Babiš and president Zeman.[110]

The commemoration of the second important date related to communism, August 21, 1968, changed over time as well. By 2018, it has been largely reduced to "the image of tanks rolling into the country,"[111] while the memory of the preceding reform process has been rather sidelined because it does not fit into the simplified narrative of a forty years period of continuous totalitarian rule imposed on Czechs from outside.[112]

[107] Andělová, "The Sound of Silence."
[108] Mark et al., "1989 After 1989: Remembering the End of State Socialism in East-Central Europe," 489.
[109] Conor O'Dwyer, "Remembering, Not Commemorating, 1989: The Twenty-Year Anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic," in *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, ed. Michael H. Bernhard and Jan Kubik (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2014), 182–83.
[110] Jan Lopatka, "Czechs Rally against Political Leaders on Eve of Velvet Revolution Anniversary," *Reuters*, November 16, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-czech-velvetrevolution-protests-idUSKBN1XQ0I4.
[111] Veronika Pehe, "Remembering 1968 in Czech Republic: Living Trauma and Forgotten Ideals," *Zeitgeschichte-online*, August 17, 2018, https://zeitgeschichte-online.de/themen/remembering-1968-czech-republic.
[112] Andělová, "The Sound of Silence"; compare with Hofmann, "'Prager Frühling' Und 'Samtene Revolution': Narrative des Realsozialismus in der Tschechischen Nationalen Identitätskonstruktion."

This chapter has shown that in comparison with other central and eastern European countries, Czechs went much further in rhetorically and legally condemning the communist regime, which was made possible by the broad anti-communist consensus of the 1990s. Furthermore, there is a strong tendency in Czechia, especially at the official (institutional) level, to portray the recent past as a forty years period of continuous totalitarian rule that was imposed on Czechoslovakia from outside. As a result, the dominant narrative rests on a rather simplified black and white image of communism, which makes it impossible for a genuine discussion to emerge – a discussion that would enable a more differentiated view of the pre-1989 past, including Czechs' (and Slovaks') own role in establishing and maintaining the power apparatus of the communist regime.

Since about 2008,[113] however, several young historians such as Michal Kopeček or Michal Pullman tried to create better conditions for a more critical discussion about the recent past. In their texts, they criticized the way Czechs deal with the socialist past – as well as the way historians write about it. In doing so, they contributed to a gradual broadening of researched topics related to communism. More and more scholars began to deal with the social and economic dimension of the state socialist reality, from social security system to growing consumerism to everyday life.[114] All these studies have seriously challenged the prevailing simplified image of the communist past described above.

[113] In this year, one of the first critical monographs by Michal Kopeček was published. Michal Kopeček, ed., *Past in the Making: Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008).
[114] Many of the 'younger' historians are affiliated either with the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences (which is the case of Michal Kopeček, Pavel Mücke, Vítězslav Sommer or Veronika Pehe) or with the Institute of Economic and Social History of the Charles University (Michal Pullmann, Jakub Rákosník or Matěj Spurný).

2 The Meaning of Urban Space Before and After 1989

2.1 Building and Maintaining Socialism Through Urban Space

Many scholars dealt with the question whether there was something like a *socialist city* at all, and if the answer is yes, what are the key features that make it unique and distinct from say *capitalist* cities.[115] Addressing these questions also requires some sensitivity towards regional differences within former Eastern Bloc. Especially Prague is a very specific case study since it survived Second World War nearly without any serious damages – in stark contrast to, for instance, Warsaw which was "almost totally destroyed."[116] As a result, the opportunities of the newly established communist regime in Czechoslovakia to substantially transform the capital were rather limited. Nevertheless, the conditions for urban planning and architecture changed dramatically after 1948 in Czechoslovakia, too. In this regard, it followed similar path as other eastern European countries.

Even though scholars often argue about the 'uniqueness' of socialist urban development (for some, it represents only one form of "modern urbanization" among many[117]), there is a broad consensus that urbanization under socialism had several particular features. These particularities were intrinsically connected to the great amount of power and control the socialist governments exercised over urban development. Indeed, the extent of power over urban space was "much greater" in socialist countries than in the capitalist ones,[118] which was the consequence of 1) the elimination of private ownership, and 2) the replacement of market

[115] See especially Hirt, Ferenčuhová, and Tuvikene, "Conceptual Forum"; Gregory D. Andrusz, Michael Harloe, and Ivan Szelenyi, eds., *Cities after Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies* (Oxford; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1996).
[116] Bartetzky, "Changes in the Political Iconography of East Central European Capitals after 1989 (Berlin, Warsaw, Prague, Bratislava)," 454.
[117] Enyedi, "Urbanization under Socialism," 103.
[118] David M. Smith, "The Socialist City," in *Cities after Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, ed. Gregory D. Andrusz, Michael Harloe, and Ivan Szelenyi (Oxford; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1996), 72.

conditions by centrally planned economy. The following paragraphs shall scrutinize, how the socialist dictatorships utilized these powers to transform the inherited *capitalist* cities into *socialist* ones.

After the communist takeover in 1948, architecture and urban planning became an important tool in the process of societal transformation towards socialism.[119] In the first stage, the new rulers invested a lot of resources into the manifestation of the victory of socialism over capitalism – by erecting new monuments or building model towns such as Stalinstadt (later Eisenhüttenstadt) in the German Democratic Republic, Nowa Huta in Poland or Ostrava-Poruba in Czechoslovakia.[120] All these examples also demonstrate another feature of socialist urbanization in the late 1940s and early 1950s, namely the interconnectedness of urban and industrial development. Indeed, the establishment of new towns in industrial areas was motivated both by ideological and economic considerations. By contrast, the social dimension of these undertakings, that is providing people with appropriate housing, played rather marginal role in the decision making – at least in Czechoslovakia where the overall housing crisis even deepened during the 1950s because the intensity of housing construction was too low.[121]

It was only in the late 1960s, and especially in the 1970s, that the housing situation in Czechoslovakia somewhat improved – as a result of the massive construction of large panel housing estates, *paneláky* in Czech. Even though housing is not the main subject of this thesis, and thus cannot be analyzed in depth,[122] it is of relevance in at least two aspects. Firstly, the

[119] See for instance Zarecor, "What Was So Socialist about the Socialist City?"; Czepczyński, *Cultural Landscapes of Post-Socialist Cities*, 2008, 59–107; Ana Miljački, *The Optimum Imperative: Czech Architecture for the Socialist Lifestyle, 1938-1968*, The Architext Series (London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).

[120] For more details and other examples see Czepczyński, *Cultural Landscapes of Post-Socialist Cities*, 2008, 73–95.

[121] Jakub Rákosník, *Sovětizace sociálního státu: lidově demokratický režim a sociální práva občanů v Československu 1945–1960* (Praha: Filozofická Fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2010), 435–66; Jiří Musil, "Urbanizace českých zemí a socialismus," in *Zrod velkoměsta: urbanizace českých zemí a Evropa*, ed. Pavla Horská, Eduard Maur, and Jiří Musil (Praha: Paseka, 2002), 277.

[122] For more information on housing during the socialist era see Lucie Skřivánková et al., eds., *Paneláci 1: Padesát sídlišť v českých zemích: kritický katalog k cyklu výstav Příběh paneláku* (Praha: Uměleckoprůmyslové museum

vast ensembles of prefabricated panel housing estates represent, as urban sociologist Jiří Musil put it, "the most visible tangible heritage [of socialism]."[123] Therefore, everybody has an opinion on them. Indeed, *paneláky* can be found in nearly every town. In Czechoslovakia only, there are more than one million dwellings in panel houses, the absolute majority of which was built during socialism. In 2020, they were still a home for some three million people, that is almost one third of the population.[124] However, the intensive housing construction had an ambiguous effect. On the one hand, it moderated the lengthy housing crisis, on the other, the repetitive, monofunctional, and visually monotonous structures also evoke(d) feelings of "grayness and boredom" in many observers,[125] a perception that was further reinforced by a critical note of the first post-communist president Václav Havel who, in his 1990 speech, used the disdainful term *rabbit hutches* when referring to panel housing estates.[126]

The other significant experience related to housing is hidden behind the phrase *elimination of private ownership*. Large industrial enterprises, banks, insurance companies etc. were nationalized already in 1945–1948. After the takeover in 1948, communists went even further and carried out not only the infamous collectivization of agriculture, but also expropriated most of the tenement buildings.[127] This step, too, had a twofold effect. It is true that the costs of housing (for households) became and remained extremely low. At the same time, however, the negligible rents did not generate enough resources for maintenance, which led to a gradual decay of the entire housing stock. In other words, the historic experience with

v Praze, 2016); Lucie Skřivánková et al., eds., *Paneláci 2: Historie sídlišť v českých zemích 1945-1989: kritický katalog k výstavě Bydliště: panelové sídliště: plány, realizace, bydlení 1945-1989* (Praha: Uměleckoprůmyslové museum v Praze, 2017); Musil, "Urbanizace českých zemí a socialismus," 237–97.

[123] Musil, "Urbanizace českých zemí a socialismus," 279.

[124] ČTK, "V panelových domech v Česku žijí v současnosti tři miliony lidí," *Archiweb*, June 28, 2020, https://www.archiweb.cz/n/domaci/v-panelovych-domech-v-cesku-ziji-v-soucasnosti-tri-miliony-lidi.

[125] Hirt, "Whatever Happened to the (Post)Socialist City?," 35.

[126] Václav Havel, "Václav Havel's Speech on the Anniversary of the February 1948 Coup. Prague, Old Town Square, February 25, 1990" (Václav Havel Library), https://www.vaclavhavel.cz/en/vaclav-havel/works/speeches.

[127] Jakub Rákosník and Igor Tomeš, eds., *Sociální stát v Československu: právně-institucionální vývoj v letech 1918-1992* (Praha: Auditorium, 2012), 294–95.

the wave of nationalization and collectivization, including the expropriations in the housing sector, might help explain the unequivocal emphasis on private ownership after 1989.

Nevertheless, the three buildings this thesis focuses on represent the exact opposite of the mass panel housing construction. It is the aim of the following paragraphs to clarify their meaning within the state socialist system – in terms of their function, political/ideological importance as well as architectural style. It has been already mentioned that urban development during the first years after 1948 was largely determined by ideological and/or industrial considerations of the new regime. This approach manifested itself not only in the construction of model socialist towns, but also in the preferred types of architectural production in the existing cities, namely the strong focus on representative (governmental) buildings, statues, monuments etc., usually located in central districts of the capitals.[128] The Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw or the Stalin monument in Prague, both of which were constructed in the first half of the 1950s, are good examples of urban interventions motivated by ideological reasons. However, apart from the Stalin monument, which was torn down already in 1962, there is no other prominent reminder of the Stalinist period in the center of Prague. Perhaps the most noticeable building in the style of the so-called socialist realism, the (in)famous Hotel International, was eventually built in a rather remote part of Dejvice, Prague's sixth district, and thus did not affect Prague's skyline.[129]

By coincidence, both the Stalin monument and Hotel International were completed only after Stalin's death, i.e. in a different political climate – roughly around the time of Khrushchev's 1956 speech on the cult of personality, and after his 1954 speech in which he

[128] Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen, "From Socialist to Post-Socialist Cities: Narrating the Nation through Urban Space," *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 4 (July 2013): 493, https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2013.768217.
[129] Kateřina Hubrtová, "Vysmívaný a nenáviděný: příběh pražského hotelu International," *Dějiny a současnost* 2007, no. 4, http://dejinyasoucasnost.cz/archiv/2007/4/vysmivany-a-nenavideny-/.

rejected socialist realism.[130] In the realm of housing, this political change resulted in a swift return to a more rational and economic way of housing construction, and to the abandonment of ideologically motivated decorations. At the same time, the entire architectural scene went through a substantial transformation, for the post-Stalinist period was marked by greater openness towards architectural trends in the West.[131] Starting with the Czechoslovak pavilion for EXPO 58 in Brussels, several architecturally ambitious projects emerged at the end of the 1950s and during the 1960s, providing a strong evidence that (even) the state socialist system enabled a certain degree of aesthetic and functional diversity. As for the architectural style, socialist realism was gradually replaced by different variants of late modernism,[132] and the spectrum of preferred building types was extended by projects aiming to accommodate people's basic needs like consumption, leisure activities and culture.[133]

As a result, dozens of department stores grew up in Czechoslovakia during the 1960s and 1970s. Nearly every larger city got at least one. Liberec was no exception. Back then, department stores served – somewhat paradoxically – as "showcases" of the socialist regime.[134] Some of them belong to the most original and innovative architecture of its time, be it Kotva and Máj in the center of Prague, or Ještěd in Liberec.[135] The two latter department stores were designed by architects affiliated with SIAL, one of the few independent architectural studios in Czechoslovakia at that time, and probably the most progressive one.[136] The example of

[130] He literally spoke about "the deviations in architecture." See Petr Roubal, "The Crisis of Modern Urbanism under the Socialist Rule," *Czech Journal of Contemporary History* 6 (2018): 104.
[131] Radomíra Sedláková, "Šedesátá léta ve světové a domácí architektuře," in *Transgas: areál řídicí ústředny Tranzitního plynovodu a budova FMPE v Praze: historie, architektura, památkový potenciál*, ed. Naďa Goryczková (Praha: Národní památkový ústav, 2019), 19–25.
[132] Such as the so-called Brussels style, international style, technicism, brutalism, high-tech etc. For a detailed overview see Rostislav Švácha, "Architektura 1958-1970," in *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění VI/1: 1958/2000*, ed. Rostislav Švácha and Marie Platovská (Praha: Academia, 2007), 31–69.
[133] Compare with Diener and Hagen, "From Socialist to Post-Socialist Cities," 495.
[134] Petr Klíma, ed., *Kotvy Máje: České Obchodní Domy 1965-1975* (Praha: Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová v Praze, 2011), 4–5.
[135] All these projects are included in the monography focused on Czechoslovak department stores: Klíma, *Kotvy Máje*.
[136] For more details see for instance Rostislav Švácha, ed., *Sial* (Olomouc: Muzeum umění Olomouc; Arbor Vitae, 2010).

department stores makes clear that there was a growing tension between the ideological role of architecture, as viewed by the regime, and the ongoing political liberalization which enabled talented architects to express themselves to a large extent freely. This was true not only for the structuralist department store in Liberec, but also for the brutalist Transgas complex which, too, originates in the late 1960s. It served as a control center for the management of natural gas transit, and as a seat of the Federal Ministry of Fuel and Energy. Yet its design was inspired by some of the then newest architectural trends in the West, most importantly by brutalism and high-tech.[137]

Even though the plans for Ještěd and Transgas are rooted in the atmosphere of political liberalization, which culminated in the Prague Spring, they were completed first in the 1970s, i.e. after the 1968 invasion, during the so-called *normalization* that was marked by another wave of political repressions. The pre-1968 origins of buildings like Transgas are often overlooked, sometimes deliberately, in order to emphasize their connection with the political regime. Nevertheless, in case of the third building analyzed here, its close connection with the normalization regime is very obvious, for the late modernist Hotel Praha was commissioned directly by the communist party in the early 1970s.[138] More precisely, it was commissioned by the party and for the party: the main purpose of the luxurious hotel in Prague's villa district Hanspaulka was to "accommodate foreign delegations and guests of the central committee of the communist party."[139] The political importance of the hotel went hand in hand with the generous funding, which enabled the architects to design and construct a very special building

[137] See the recent monograph about Transgas published by the Czech National Heritage Institute. Naďa Goryczková, ed., *Transgas: areál řídicí ústředny Tranzitního plynovodu a budova FMPE v Praze: historie, architektura, památkový potenciál* (Praha: Národní památkový ústav, 2019).
[138] Ladislav Zikmund-Lender, "Soutěž, projekt, výstavba," in *Hotel Praha*, ed. Pavel Karous (Praha: BiggBoss; Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová v Praze; Galerie výtvarného umění v Chebu, 2019), 16–35.
[139] Ibid., 17.

– with regards to its dynamic form, placement within the sloping terrain, and high-quality interieur decorations.[140]

Despite their different functions and architectural styles, Hotel Praha, Ještěd department store as well as the administrative complex Transgas have many common features. Firstly, they give evidence that besides the mass (panel) housing construction and other products of the industrialized and standardized construction sector, a number of atypical, highly individualized buildings were designed specifically for a given location, often by using unconventional technologies and approaches. Secondly, all three projects enjoyed great financial support from the state socialist system because they played important role in the regime's self-presentation both domestically, towards its own population, as well as externally, in relation to other countries. Such architectural projects were supposed to demonstrate a "modern image of socialism" and "exhibit the virtues and achievements of socialist governance."[141] The third common feature is the "extraordinary spatial generosity,"[142] a "more generous use of urban space."[143] What has been identified by urban sociologists as one of the characteristics of socialist urbanization can be also applied to single architectural projects, especially when it comes to such important (public) buildings. The elimination of private ownership and the replacement of market conditions with centrally planned economy led to a different perception of urban space in socialist countries. As a result, architects and urban planners "could pay more attention to aesthetic rather than to narrow economic considerations."[144] It was precisely this non-market way of thinking that enabled several unique buildings like Transgas, Ještěd and

[140] For more details see Karous, *Hotel Praha*.
[141] Diener and Hagen, "From Socialist to Post-Socialist Cities," 495. See also Švácha, "Architektura 1958-1970." In case of Hotel Praha, the interpretation is a bit more complicated, because its 'audience' was limited to the prominent foreign guests of the communist party.
[142] Hirt, "Whatever Happened to the (Post)Socialist City?," S31.
[143] Ivan Szelenyi, "Cities under Socialism – and After," in *Cities after Socialism: Urban and Regional Change and Conflict in Post-Socialist Societies*, ed. Gregory D. Andrusz, Michael Harloe, and Ivan Szelenyi (Oxford; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1996), 302.
[144] Szelenyi, 301.

Hotel Praha to emerge. And it was the same spatial generosity that made it difficult for these buildings to survive after 1989 – in an economic system that requires efficient utilization of space.

As for the development of heritage preservation during socialism, there was a certain gradual progress, especially with regards to its institutionalization on the municipal level.[145] In general, institutions of heritage preservation played an important role in the documentation of historic sights, and in the regulation of new construction.[146] Due to the lack of financial resources, however, the actual preservation activities were rather limited. As the art historian Martin Horáček summarized, "there was not much care taken of monuments, landscape or even common housing stock during communism except for the short period of time in the first half of the 1950s."[147] In addition to the insufficient care, some valuable buildings were also demolished – such as the former train station Těšnov in Prague from 1875, which cleared the way to the north-south highway (Magistrála), or a group of historic buildings in Jihlava that were pulled down and replaced by a "hideous" department store.[148] Despite all these shortcomings, the overall result of the heritage preservation sector was actually not so bad, especially in Prague whose central districts have held the status of heritage reservation since 1951, respectively 1971.[149] Thanks to this legal protection, the historic center of Prague remained relatively intact, although in a very poor state.[150] Besides that, the current cultural heritage legislation is, until this day, based on the 1987 State Heritage Preservation Act.

[145] Martin Hořák, *Úspěch i zklamání: demokracie a veřejná politika v Praze 1990-2000* (Prague: Charles University in Prague, Karolinum Press, 2014), 119–24.
[146] Hořák, 122.
[147] Martin Horáček, *Úvod do památkové péče* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2015), 67.
[148] The term hideous (*obludný* in Czech) was used by the art historian Petr Kratochvíl. Petr Kratochvíl, "Architektura sedmdesátých a osmdesátých let," in *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění VI/1: 1958/2000*, ed. Rostislav Švácha and Marie Platovská (Praha: Academia, 2007), 392.
[149] Kateřina Bečková, ed., *Sto let Klubu Za starou Prahu: 1900-2000* (Praha: Schola Ludus - Pragensia, 2000), 75.
[150] There were several projects for the redevelopment of entire districts but the communist régime lacked financial resources to carry them out. In addition, these plans also triggered public protests. See for instance the case of Prague's third district Žižkov. Petr Roubal, "The Battle of Žižkov: Urban Planners' Transition from Heritage

2.2 Losing the Control Over Urban Space: Heritage Preservation in Times of (Free) Market Economy

As in the case of the (alleged) *socialist city*, there has also been a lengthy scholarly debate about the *post-socialist city*.[151] The previous section has shown that the particularity of the socialist urban development was directly linked to the political and economic system installed in Czechoslovakia by the communist party after 1948. Many scholars of socialist urbanization, including Sonia Hirt, came to the conclusion that it was the nearly unlimited "power of the socialist state (…) to control urban land, real estate, and the means of production"[152] what made the architecture and urban planning under socialism so peculiar. It is thus obvious that the four decades of the communist rule influenced the development of cities profoundly. In this sense, the built heritage of socialism continues to affect central and eastern European cities to the present day. At the same time, the transformation of the political and economic system after 1989, too, had a substantial impact on the perception – and treatment – of urban space. It fundamentally changed the conditions for urban development and redefined the role of heritage preservation in the new, democratic political system based on (free) market economy.

Indeed, the early post-socialist period was marked not only by democratization of the political system, but also by a relatively swift and thorough economic transformation, both of which had far-reaching implications. Moreover, the process of transition from centrally planned to market economy was strongly influenced by neoliberal economic thought. Following the principles of neoliberalism was presented by its proponents in Czechia as the only possible way for the country to "radically cut itself off from the communist past."[153] Thus, the 1990s saw a

Protection to Neoliberal Discursive Planning," *Journal of Urban History*, March 14, 2020, 009614422090888, https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144220908881.

[151] For a review of the debate(s) see Hirt, Ferenčuhová, and Tuvikene, "Conceptual Forum."

[152] Hirt, Ferenčuhová, and Tuvikene, 499.

[153] Michal Kopeček, "Úvod: Expertní kořeny postsocialismu: výzkumné perspektivy a metodologické nástroje," in *Architekti dlouhé změny: expertní kořeny postsocialismu v Československu*, ed. Michal Kopeček (Praha: Argo, Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, Univerzita Karlova, Filozofická fakulta, 2019), 16.

large-scale privatization of literally everything from state-owned enterprises to housing.[154] The "concept of 'public good'" was replaced by "individual responsibility and individual initiative," and the language (and needs) of the market began to dominate all spheres of life.[155] At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the shape of the economic transformation as well as its negative consequences became subject of criticism already in the 1990s, especially among sociologists, anthropologists and political economists.[156] In other words, the ongoing democratization and pluralization of all spheres of life (media, academia, civil society, independent culture etc.) created a very complex social environment in which the ideas of neoliberalism did not enjoy absolute support.

The neoliberal consensus (rather than hegemony[157]) was, nevertheless, strong enough to significantly reinforce certain values that represented the exact opposite of what had been associated with communism: it contributed to a broad political (and societal) preference of the individual over the collective, private over public, market over regulation. This trend resulted not only in the aforementioned wave of privatization, but also in the gradual "liberalization of prizes," both of which strengthened the position of domestic and international "private actors operating in the city (including property owners)."[158] In such political climate, "urban planning has (…) been seen as contradictory to the market" and thus undesirable.[159] To describe the "skepticism towards rational city planning"[160] after 1989, historian Petr Roubal used the terms

[154] The Ještěd department store, hotel Praha, and Transgas were privatized, too (either during the 1990s or in the early 2000s). For more details see chapter 3.
[155] Kopeček, "Úvod: Expertní kořeny postsocialismu: výzkumné perspektivy a metodologické nástroje," 16.
[156] Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik, "Introduction: Towards and Intellectual History of Post-Socialism," in *Thinking Through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts, and Intellectual History in East Central Europe After 1989*, ed. Michal Kopeček and Piotr Wciślik (Central European University Press, 2015), 8–15, www.jstor.org/stable/10.7829/j.ctt19z3941.3.
[157] Compare with Kopeček and Wciślik, "Introduction: Towards and Intellectual History of Post-Socialism"; Kopeček, "Úvod: Expertní kořeny postsocialismu: výzkumné perspektivy a metodologické nástroje."
[158] Sýkora, "Changes in the Internal Spatial Structure of Post-Communist Prague," 81.
[159] Sýkora and Bouzarovski, "Multiple Transformations," 51.
[160] Petr Roubal, "Plánování Prahy 80. - 90. léta: sebedestrukce urbanistické expertizy," in *Architekti dlouhé změny: expertní kořeny postsocialismu v Československu*, ed. Michal Kopeček (Praha: Argo, Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, Univerzita Karlova, Filozofická fakulta, 2019), 336.

"urban anticommunism"[161] and "urban neoliberalism."[162] As a result, the influence of urban planners rapidly decreased, and the development of cities began to be dominated by the logic of (free) market economy, i.e. by private investors and developers.[163] In comparison with the state socialist period, the democratic, market-oriented state lost most of its powers over urban space,[164] which also found expression in weak governance, lack of coherent policies, corruption etc. The following paragraphs shall demonstrate that the legacy of the early post-socialist transformation had an enormous and long-lasting impact on the urban development of post-1989 cities, including the domain of heritage preservation.

If the large panel housing ensembles constitute the most recognizable heritage of socialism,[165] then what are the most substantial urban changes caused by the post-1989 development? According to the urban geographer Luděk Sýkora, post-socialist cities went through *multiple transformations*, from institutional reconfiguration to the change of social practices. These changes resulted in three main trends: commercialization, (partial) revitalization of the inner city, and suburbanization.[166] Restitution and privatization of the existing housing stock, establishment of real estate market, intensification of (international) business and tourism, and several other processes contributed to the growing pressure on economic utilization of urban space, which inevitably led to many conflicts, especially in central districts of larger cities. The needs of local inhabitants (housing, services) were

[161] Roubal, 316.
[162] Roubal, "The Battle of Žižkov," 9. However, in other texts, Roubal points out that the scepticism towards modern urban planning has deeper roots. The debates about the limits of modern urban planning started in Czechoslovakia already in the 1970s. See for instance Roubal, "The Crisis of Modern Urbanism under the Socialist Rule."
[163] Compare with Jiří Musil, "Co se děje s českými městy dnes," in *Zrod velkoměsta: urbanizace českých zemí a Evropa*, ed. Pavla Horská, Eduard Maur, and Jiří Musil (Praha: Paseka, 2002), 313; Roubal, "Plánování Prahy 80. - 90. léta: sebedestrukce urbanistické expertizy," 346.
[164] As Sonia Hirt put it, "the state no longer has a monopoly over urban development." See Hirt, "Whatever Happened to the (Post)Socialist City?," S30.
[165] Compare with Musil, "Urbanizace českých zemí a socialismus," 279.
[166] Sýkora and Bouzarovski, "Multiple Transformations"; Sýkora, "Changes in the Internal Spatial Structure of Post-Communist Prague". See also Kiril Stanilov, ed., *The Post-Socialist City: Urban Form and Space Transformations in Central and Eastern Europe after Socialism* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007).

challenged by the needs of international business and tourism (commercialization of urban space).[167] Similar conflicts arose in the domain of heritage preservation, too. The example of Prague shows that municipal governments, at least in the 1990s, often favored private interests.[168]

Even though the historic center of Prague has been listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1992, the three post-socialist decades saw several controversial demolitions and radical reconstructions, many of which were heavily criticized by art historians and preservationists. Perhaps the best-known affair concerned three lucrative plots on the riverbank near Charles Bridge. All of them belonged to the city, along with two of the three historic buildings standing on them (in baroque, classicist, and neo-renaissance style).[169] Yet instead of using this valuable urban space for public purposes, the municipal government eventually provided the three plots (and two buildings) to the international hotel company Four Seasons. The huge, 2001-opened hotel shows – according to its critics – little respect both to the heritage value of the three historic buildings it occupies, as well as to the unique panorama of Prague's Old Town.[170]

This example illustrates some of the weaknesses of heritage preservation after 1989. First of all, the decision-making process on the municipal level is often *ad hoc* and nontransparent. According to Martin Hořák who analyzed Prague's municipal governance during the 1990s, the lack of coherent policy in the area of heritage preservation was very welcome for the local politicians since it allowed the "random, behind-closed-doors way of decision-making" to continue.[171] This, in combination with the imperfect legislation and

[167] Sýkora, "Changes in the Internal Spatial Structure of Post-Communist Prague," 82–85.
[168] Sýkora, 82–85.
[169] For a detailed description of the case see Martin Horák, *Úspěch i zklamání: demokracie a veřejná politika v Praze 1990-2000* (Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2014), 211–13.
[170] See the summary of the affair by the Club for the old Prague: "Hotel Four Seasons Na Alšově Nábřeží," *Zastarouprahu.cz*, http://stary-web.zastarouprahu.cz/kauzy/4seas/02-FourSeason.htm.
[171] Hořák, *Úspěch i zklamání: demokracie a veřejná politika v Praze 1990-2000*, 191.

enormous pressure from private investors, created a fertile ground for corruption. For instance, the 1992-founded Department of Heritage Preservation at the Prague City Council was, at least in the 1990s, widely regarded as "corrupted office."[172] Another set of problems is related to the institutional arrangement of heritage preservation, namely the separation of the professional (advisory) and executive (decision-making) branch, a principle that defines the heritage preservation system of Czechia until this day.[173] Thus, it is no exception that the final decision taken by the Ministry of Culture (or some municipal authority) contradicts the recommendation of some of the expert committees.

Despite these challenges, a considerable progress has been achieved in the 1990s with regards to postwar architecture. Several valuable buildings and housing ensembles, mostly from the 1950s but partly also from the 1960s and 1970s, received the status of cultural monument and thus became part of the officially recognized cultural heritage of the Czech Republic. Yet "after 2000, as if something had happened, and the approach of responsible institutions changed significantly,"[174] the art historian Rostislav Švácha told me. It might be partly explained by the large-scale privatization after 1989 that also affected many buildings from the socialist period, including potential cultural monuments. Perhaps it is also related to the fact that buildings from the 1960s and 1970s have in the meantime gotten older and sometimes also lost their initial function.[175]

Were there also other factors that contributed to the demolition of some of the best examples of postwar architecture in the last 10–15 years? What role did the 'communist past' of these buildings play in the ongoing expert and public discussion about postwar architecture,

[172] Hořák, 196.
[173] Horáček, *Úvod do památkové péče*, 71–78.
[174] Švácha, interview, August 22, 2019.
[175] Compare with Biegel, "Nejmladší památky: Na úvod nové rubriky," 30.

which started to unfold in the 2000s? These are some of the questions that will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

3 The Gradual Disappearance of the Architectural Heritage of Socialism

3.1 Ještěd Department Store: From Showcase of Socialism to Outdated Shopping Center

3.1.1 Shopping under socialism – and after[176]

The city of Liberec in north Bohemia. Late 1970s. A group of people crowded in front of a large two-winged door with a round glass window. Old lady with a handbag, small boy in a jacket, young man with a child sitting on his neck. All of them are curiously looking through the door into the fresh new department store that is about to open its doors to public for the first time.[177] "Guarantee of quality shopping, (…), a valuable gift" that will "strengthen the network of services in the center of Liberec"[178] and provide "our consumer public"[179] with many useful goods, reported the local party press. Moreover, it also praised the architectural qualities of the building, claiming that the new department store will allow visitors to "shop in a really beautiful and cultural environment."[180]

At the same time, however, none of these articles mentioned the names of the architects since the societal position of both Karel Hubáček and Miroslav Masák changed dramatically after 1968. Masák was one of the key figures – alongside Václav Havel – who organized local resistance to the occupation in August 1968,[181] as a result of which he "lost the position of

[176] The title refers to Szelenyi, "Cities under Socialism - and After."
[177] I was describing a photo by Pavel Štecha and Jiří Erml. Published in Jiroutek, *Už nejdu do Ještědu = I no longer shop at Ještěd*, 82.
[178] Scan picture of an article in the local party newspaper Vpřed [Forward] published on 17 July 1979. Reprint in Jiroutek, 100.
[179] Scan picture of an article in an unknown local newspaper, published a week before the opening of the first section (pavilion) of the department store in 1978. Reprint in Jiroutek, 84.
[180] Scan picture of an article in the local party newspaper Vpřed [Forward] published on 17 July 1979. Reprint in Jiroutek, 100.
[181] Václav Havel was coincidentally visiting Liberec, which is why he spent the first days of occupation exactly here. Masák and Havel were friends. For more details see Miroslav Masák, *Tak nějak to bylo* (Praha: KANT, 2006), 39–41.

leading architect" in the SIAL studio, his "salary was reduced," and his passport was taken from him in order to prevent him from travelling abroad.[182] The entire architectural studio had a similar fate. The 1968-estbalished, and in the meanwhile highly regarded SIAL, was forced to reintegrate itself into the centralized Stavoprojekt in 1972.[183] In the upcoming years, it became "more and more difficult [for SIAL architects] to get a good commission," noted Masák later in his memoirs.[184] Thus, the department store was praised while its authors were completely ignored. After 1989, the SIAL architects enjoyed another wave of appreciation, which, nevertheless, did not help to prevent the demolition of their work.

According to the architects themselves, the department store was actually "not a department store but a roofed marketplace."[185] This *marketplace* consisted of three connected yet distinct pavilions that were further divided into smaller sections. Pavilion C, for instance, was dedicated to groceries. Vegetables, meat etc. were located in the ground floor, supermarket in the first floor, and milk and confectionery products in the upper floor. The two remaining pavilions offered fashion products and household goods. Both of them were divided into several specialized shops, too.[186]

Since its opening in the late 1970s, the department store served the socialist "consumer public" and after 1989 also the capitalist one. However, the new owner decided to use the lucrative plot in the center of Liberec in a more economic way, and thus started to strive for a demolition of the 'outdated'[187] department store.

[182] All this happened in the early 1970s. See Masák, 48–49.
[183] Masák, 45.
[184] Masák, 46.
[185] This citation of Masák comes from a TV documentary about Sial. See Pavel Jirásek, "SIAL - Legenda České Architektury," *Styl*, 2007, 11:05–11:13, https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10098875020-styl/307295350200010/.
[186] The layout of the department store is described in the two then-contemporary articles in local press. See their reprints published in Jiroutek, *Už nejdu do Ještědu = I no longer shop at Ještěd*, 84, 100.
[187] This kind of argumentation had been used quite often. See the next section for more details.

3.1.2 Unique structuralist architecture or outdated department store?

The need to accommodate different types of sales, together with the aim to sensitively complete the lower center of Liberec, resulted in the highly complex architectural form of the Ještěd department store. Due to its "sculptural articulation, (…) exaggeration of art and color," as well as "its distinctive composition," it was often praised by experts as one of the rare examples of "structuralist architecture" in Czechoslovakia.[188] The project of Ještěd was also influenced by growing interest of the SIAL architects in sociological and psychological aspects of urban planning. Thus, the complex form of the building included several "interspaces in different heights, accessible terraces, ramps and staircases,"[189] as well as various passages that were supposed to "evoke (…) something historical, a tissue of a historical town."[190] Besides all these unique features, the department store was for many art historians valuable already because "it is a product of SIAL."[191]

All these arguments found expression in the three official requests to the Ministry of Culture to declare the building cultural monument, and thus prevent it from demolition. The first one (2005) was submitted by former SIAL architect Jiří Suchomel, the second (2005) by renowned art historian and university professor Rostislav Švácha, and the last one (2007) by the then employee of the Liberec office of the National Heritage Institute Jiří Křížek together with architect David Vávra. The third attempt emphasized the fact that – in the meanwhile – another famous department store designed by SIAL received the status of cultural monument, namely the Máj department store in Prague. If a building like Máj became cultural monument, then the Ministry should reconsider its negative stance on Ještěd, so the argument of the

[188] Here I have cited the words of recognition written by the architecture historian Oldřich Ševčík. See Oldřich Ševčík, "Thoughts on a building, architecture, and time," in *Už nejdu do Ještědu = I no longer shop at Ještěd*, ed. Jiří Jiroutek (Liberec: Fenomén Ještěd s.r.o., 2019), 13.
[189] Ševčík, 13.
[190] Rostislav Švácha, interview by Filip Rambousek, July 27, 2020, Praha.
[191] Švácha.

preservationist Křížek went.[192] On top of that, the three requests were accompanied by a public petition in support of Ještěd. According to some sources, roughly four thousand people signed it.[193]

Nevertheless, none of these efforts made the Ministry revise its opinion. It decided, contrary to the recommendation of its expert committee,[194] not to declare Ještěd a cultural monument. In its final decision, the Ministry described the building as a "non-avantgarde architecture of the 1960s,"[195] and criticized the "drastic intervention" the project of Ještěd meant to the center of Liberec.[196] As the then head of the Heritage Preservation Department of the Ministry of Culture Petra Ulbrichová explained towards media in 2007, "the overall quality of the building is not (…) high enough to declare it a cultural monument."[197] By refusing to provide the building with legal protection, the Ministry *de facto* cleared the way for its demolition, which was exactly what the owner was striving for.

The investor argued that the old department store is outdated, and the way of shopping it represents is not compatible with "new trends."[198] Yet it is obvious that the replacement of the old department store with the new one was motivated primarily by economic interests, not by the alleged aim to create "greater comfort for costumers."[199] As the architect of the new

[192] Jiří Křížek, interview by Filip Rambousek, January 22, 2021, Liberec.
[193] See for instance Karolína Vránková, "Čas bourání Ještědů," *Respekt*, February 20, 2009, https://www.respekt.cz/tydenik/2009/9/cas-bourani-jestedu.
[194] Adam Pluhař, "Architekt Masák: ten důvod je zvláštní," *iDnes.cz*, April 22, 2009, https://www.idnes.cz/bydleni/architektura/architekt-masak-ten-duvod-je-zvlastni.A090420_162122_architektura_web.
[195] Cited from Helena Doudová, "Obchodní středisko Ještěd," in *Kotvy Máje: české obchodní domy 1965-1975*, ed. Petr Klíma (Praha: Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová v Praze, 2011), 138.
[196] The formulation "drastic intervention" comes from the art historian Helena Doudová, the author of the chapter about Ještěd, and does not necessarily stand in the ministerial document. It is her paraphrase thereof. See Doudová, 138.
[197] Cited from Šárka Urbánková, "Obchodní dům Ještěd v Liberci" (MA thesis, Liberec, Technická univerzita v Liberci, 2015), 63.
[198] Martina Machová, "Památka nepamátka, Obchodní dům Ještěd mizí ze světa," *Aktuálně.cz*, March 25, 2009, https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/ekonomika/ceska-ekonomika/pamatka-nepamatka-obchodni-dum-jested-mizi-ze-sveta/r~i:article:632865/.
[199] Machová.

department store Forum put it, "the surfaces [of the old department store] are insufficiently utilized, it is noneconomic."[200]

Besides the aforementioned role of the Ministry of Culture, the demolition was also made possible by the decision of the Liberec city council in 2005 to sell the respective plots to the investor. In addition, "many [councilors] actively promoted the demolition."[201] For the inhabitants of Liberec, it was probably not so surprising since the north bohemian metropolis was widely known as one of the most corrupted cities in Czechia at that time. In 2005, the weekly magazine Respekt described Liberec as a "Mecca of corruption" in which strong links existed between municipal politicians and private interests.[202]

It can be therefore concluded that in case of the Ještěd department store, its link with the communist regime was not so much emphasized in the debates.[203] The proponents of the demolition rather stressed the unsuitable architectural form of the old department store as well as the insufficient utilization of the plot.

3.1.3 The indifference of the Liberec public

When the company Tesco started to dismantle the old department store in 2009, even the critics of the building saw "a piece of their life disappearing. And there was nobody who would be saying: 'it is great that the old building has finally disappeared,'" recalls the preservationist Jiří Křížek.[204] Similar memories has also the Liberec based curator Luděk Lukuvka who co-organized a widely attended exhibition about the Ještěd department store in 2010. "Not even a

[200] Urbánková, "Obchodní Dům Ještěd v Liberci," 52.
[201] Machová, "Památka nepamátka, Obchodní dům Ještěd mizí ze světa."
[202] Eliška Bártová, "Co se nosí: máslo na hlavě," *Respekt*, July 3, 2005, https://www.respekt.cz/tydenik/2005/27/co-se-nosi-maslo-na-hlave.
[203] Liberec based preservationist and cultural manager Jiří Křížek confirmed this observation in an interview. Křížek, interview.
[204] Křížek, interview.

year has passed from the demolition, and I could feel that most of the people have realized that it is not right that the building has vanished. You could feel it in the air."[205] Before the demolition, however, Liberec public was very polarized. "Half of the people was in favor of the demolition, half against it. Maybe 60 % supported the preservation of Ještěd," estimates Lukuvka.[206]

Yet nobody stepped out to organize a protest. No protest groups emerged. "Most of the people live their private lives,"[207] explains Křížek. When trying to understand the overall "disinterest and passivity of the public,"[208] both Křížek and Lukuvka point out the turbulent history of Liberec, especially the long-standing predominance of German speaking population in the city that was reversed only by the postwar expulsion of Germans. In consequence of that, "the overwhelming majority of residents is uprooted from this city, because they came after 1945."[209] Another reason for the weakness of the Liberec civil society might be related to the timing. „If the demolition [of the Ještěd department store] came (…) ten years later, (…) the younger generation would already make itself felt,"[210] believes Křížek.

Nevertheless, between 2005 and 2009, i.e. in the period during which the fate of the Ještěd department store was negotiated, no public protests took place. Moreover, as if the ignorance of the broader public went hand in hand with the arrogance of the local political elite. "It was a truly surrealist experience," recalls Křížek. "When the demolition of the department was about to begin, Tesco organized a big party and invited the mayor [of Liberec] as well as

[205] Luděk Lukuvka, interview by Filip Rambousek, January 28, 2021, Liberec, Praha.
[206] Lukuvka.
[207] Křížek, interview.
[208] Lukuvka, interview.
[209] Lukuvka.
[210] Křížek, interview.

the regional council president. They prepared a big cake in the shape of Ještěd department store and cut it up with a knife."[211]

3.2 Hotel Praha: From a Communist Arrogance to the Capitalist One

3.2.1 Luxurious accommodation under socialism – and after[212]

The first years after the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 were extremely turbulent. The suppression of the Prague Spring was followed by massive purges within the communist party as well as beyond it. Step by step, the new political leadership paved the way for what has been later termed *normalization*. Even in this tense atmosphere, however, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia found enough time to deal with some rather practical issues, too, such as the construction of a luxurious hotel for its own needs.

There is no doubt that it was a very prestigious commission with a generous budget. "The construction of the hotel will be carried out according to the most modern and progressive parameters, including luxurious [interior] equipment," decided the party leadership in December 1969.[213] Moreover, since this task was also politically highly sensitive, the Central Committee organized an invited competition in which only seven carefully selected architectural studios were allowed to take part.[214] It is thus no surprise that the author of the winning project was an architect loyal to the post-1968 regime, later dean of the Faculty of Architecture of the Czech Technical University, Jan Sedláček. Nevertheless, some "likeable personalities", too, could be found in his team, "for instance Arnošt Navrátil."[215] The same is

[211] Křížek, interview. The 'surrealist' scene is captured on a photo. Reprint of the picture can be found in Jiroutek, *Už nejdu do Ještědu = I no longer shop at Ještěd*, 205.
[212] The title refers to Szelenyi, "Cities under Socialism - and After."
[213] See the resolution of the Secretariat of the Communist Party Central Committee from December 1969. Cited from Zikmund-Lender, "Soutěž, projekt, výstavba," 17.
[214] Zikmund-Lender, 19.
[215] Švácha, interview, August 22, 2019.

true for the involved visual artists. Whereas some of them belonged to the "nomenclature artists," as the architecture historian Zdeněk Lukeš put it,[216] others "had open conflict with the emerging *normalization* regime."[217]

The project itself certainly did meet the expectations of the client. The 1981-opened Hotel Praha had a very elegant – liquid[218] – architectural form that made use of the sloping terrain, not to mention the luxurious construction and cladding materials, and the exclusive interieur equipment accompanied by a number of original artworks. A unique piece of architecture that was supposed to amaze prominent foreign guests of the communist party such as Leonid Brezhnev (1981), Muammar Kaddafi (1982), and Yasser Arafat (repeatedly).[219] It was probably due to its exposed function that the hotel was not so much thematized in architectural magazines before 1989.[220] As if the communist party leadership wanted to hide its hypocrisy. On the one hand, it continued to proclaim egalitarianism, on the other, it encouraged (and profited from) social stratification. It built large panel housing estates for the people, and a luxurious hotel for itself.[221]

Nevertheless, the communist cadres and their foreign guests enjoyed the luxury of Hotel Praha only for less than ten years. Immediately after the Velvet Revolution, it became property of the municipal district Prague 6, as a result of which the hotel was made accessible to the general public. Everybody could now make use of "the indoor swimming pool, tennis courts, sauna, massage, tanning booths, fitness center, aerobics, billiards, bowling, sweet-shop,

[216] Zdeněk Lukeš, interview by Filip Rambousek, November 9, 2020, Praha.
[217] Pavel Karous, "Umění v Hotelu ČSSR," in *Hotel Praha*, ed. Pavel Karous (Praha: BiggBoss; Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová v Praze; Galerie výtvarného umění v Chebu, 2019), 72.
[218] Ladislav Zikmund-Lender, "Hotel Praha Nepamátkou," in *Hotel Praha*, ed. Pavel Karous (Praha: BiggBoss; Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová v Praze; Galerie výtvarného umění v Chebu, 2019), 53.
[219] Pavel Karous, "Provozování Hotelu Praha 1980-1989," in *Hotel Praha*, ed. Pavel Karous (Praha: BiggBoss; Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová v Praze; Galerie výtvarného umění v Chebu, 2019), 187–89.
[220] According to some co-authors of the hotel, a "media embargo" had been imposed on the building. For more details see Ladislav Zikmund-Lender, "Obraz Hotelu," in *Hotel Praha*, ed. Pavel Karous (Praha: BiggBoss; Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová v Praze; Galerie výtvarného umění v Chebu, 2019), 56–59.
[221] Compare with Karous, "Provozování Hotelu Praha 1980-1989," 188.

brasserie and restaurant" as well as "the park and terrace."[222] Moreover, the new owner often used the representative premises for organizing cultural and social events, many of which were accessible to the wider public. At the same time, the building continued to serve as a hotel. Only the clientele somewhat changed. Instead of Brezhnev and Kaddafi, Hotel Praha welcomed some of the most prominent celebrities from the west, such as Tom Cruise, Nicol Kidman or Simon and Garfunkel.[223]

After 1989, however, it soon became clear that the hotel would require a costly reconstruction in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the municipal district Prague 6 came up with an idea for a public-private partnership project that would enable the municipality to modernize the building without losing control over its future. Yet the aim to get some private investor involved eventually failed in 1995.[224] As a result, the hotel was, shortly thereafter, privatized, and several years later sold to a dubious Georgian-Swiss company with no experiences in hotel management, but with ties to former members of the Soviet secret service.[225] The incompetence of the new owner led to a significant decline in the quality of services as well as to a gradual degradation of the architectural value of the building.[226]

In June 2013, the hotel was eventually acquired by the investment group PPF with the aim to tear it down and replace it with a new building of a private elementary school and high school. The first part of the plan was carried out swiftly. Hotel Praha disappeared during April and May 2014. Yet the promised school has not been built until this day. The plot still remains empty. Some of the art historians and artists involved in the efforts to preserve Hotel Praha therefore suggest that the true reason for the demolition is to be found elsewhere, more precisely

[222] Martin Kohout, "Provozování Hotelu Praha 1990-2001," in *Hotel Praha*, ed. Pavel Karous (Praha: BiggBoss; Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová v Praze; Galerie výtvarného umění v Chebu, 2019), 193.
[223] Kohout, 193.
[224] For more details see Kohout, 192–98.
[225] Kohout, 199–201.
[226] Pavel Karous, "Provozování Hotelu Praha 2002-2014," in *Hotel Praha*, ed. Pavel Karous (Praha: BiggBoss; Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová v Praze; Galerie výtvarného umění v Chebu, 2019), 209.

in the person of Peter Kellner, the then owner of PPF and richest Czech businessman who used to live in a villa next door. As the art historian Milena Bartlová put it, "Peter Kellner had Hotel Praha demolished for one reason only: to have a better view of Prague from his villa."[227] In other words, purchasing the hotel was not perceived as a business opportunity by Peter Kellner but merely as a way to get rid of an unpleasant neighbor.

3.2.2 The sexiest postwar building or a communist bunker?[228]

"Hotel Praha became known to the general public only in the moment when it was already threatened with demolition,"[229] i.e. during the last year of its existence between 2013 and 2014. Despite that, a very interesting and lively public debate arouse around the fate of the disputed architectural legacy. The proponents of preservation argued that the hotel represents a sort of "*Gesamtkunstwerk* (…), unique combination of architecture, design and art in a single work of art."[230] With regards to the overall architectural concept that was inspired by the sloping terrain of the plot, some art historians even spoke of "liquid architecture."[231] All of these arguments also appeared in the official request from February 2013 to declare Hotel Praha cultural monument. The application was put together by art historians Milena Bartlová and Ladislav Zikmund-Lender, together with the sculptor Pavel Karous. Yet regardless the opinion of the expert committee of the Ministry of Culture, and the respective regional office of the National

[227] Milena Bartlová, interview by Filip Rambousek, August 24, 2020, Praha. The artist and activist Pavel Karous interpreted the demolition in a similar way. Karous, "Provozování Hotelu Praha 2002-2014," 212; Pavel Karous, interview by Filip Rambousek, August 28, 2020, Praha.
[228] The designation „sexiest postwar building" comes from the sculptor and co-author of the monograph on Hotel Praha Pavel Karous. See Jarda Petřík, "Člověk se tam cítil jak arabský šejk, říká o hotelu Praha editor stejnojmenné publikace Pavel Karous," *On Air* (Radio Wave, May 3, 2019), https://wave.rozhlas.cz/clovek-se-tam-citil-jak-arabsky-sejk-rika-o-hotelu-praha-editor-stejnojmenne-7908999. The designation "communist bunker" comes from a newspaper article that is based on an interview with the architecture historian Zdeněk Lukeš. See Pavel Švec, "Hotel Praha je komunistický kryt, bude se těžko bořit, říká architekt," *iDnes.cz*, January 26, 2013, https://www.idnes.cz/bydleni/stavba/hotel-praha-bourani.A130125_134458_reality_bdp_web.
[229] Karous, "Provozování Hotelu Praha 2002-2014," 207.
[230] Karous, 209–11.
[231] Zikmund-Lender, "Hotel Praha nepamátkou," 53.

Heritage Institute, the Ministry decided not to initiate the proceedings at all. In doing so, it de facto paved the way for the later demolition.[232]

At the same time, however, there were also strong voices in favour of the demolition, some of them even within the Czech art history community. "I was literally filled with joy when Hotel Praha disappeared," Petr Kratochvíl, a renowned architecture historian from the Academy of Sciences told me.[233] He, as well as other like-minded art historians, usually point out that the hotel did not respect the character of the surrounding villa district.[234] Some critics also questioned the architectural qualities of the building.[235] Moreover, many claims with no relation to art history appeared in the debate as well. It was, for instance, often argued that the hotel was oversized, difficult to maintain, and thus unprofitable.[236] Yet the authors of the monograph on Hotel Praha convincingly proved that the hotel generated significant profits, at least in the 1990s, i.e. before its privatization. The only problem was that these profits were not – not even partially – used for necessary maintenance and minor renovations.[237] It is quite paradoxical that the economic argument was, in a remarkable way, endorsed also by the then newly appointed Minister of Culture Jiří Balvín. The Minister explained in a media interview that he cannot do anything about the demolition "because the hotel had been bought by PPF, which can do whatever it wants with it."[238] As if the private interests of the owner were superior to the (potential) public interest.[239]

[232] For more details see Zikmund-Lender, 53–55.
[233] Petr Kratochvíl, interview by Filip Rambousek, August 19, 2020, Praha.
[234] Even some supporters of Hotel Praha, such as Rostislav Švácha, acknowledged that it did not fit into the residential area. Švácha, interview, July 27, 2020.
[235] Especially Zdeněk Lukeš. Lukeš, interview. However, another art historian, Ladislav Zikmund-Lender, pointed to the possible links between Lukeš and PPF, the last owner of Hotel Praha. See Zikmund-Lender, "Hotel Praha nepamátkou," 55.
[236] However, these arguments were used mainly by the PPF group, i.e. the last owner of Hotel Praha. Karous, "Provozování Hotelu Praha 2002-2014," 211. The only art historian who repeatedly mentioned the "economic" argument was Zdeněk Lukeš. Lukeš, interview.
[237] Kohout, "Provozování Hotelu Praha 1990-2001," 197.
[238] Jiří Balvín, Ministr Balvín nebude bránit demolici domu na Václavském náměstí ani Hotelu Praha, interview by Michaela Vetešková, Český rozhlas, July 12, 2013, https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/ministr-balvin-nebude-branit-demolici-domu-na-vaclavskem-namesti-ani-hotelu-praha-_201307121510_mvydrova.
[239] Had the Ministry eventually come to the conclusion that Hotel Praha deserved the status of cultural monument.

Since the construction of Hotel Praha was commissioned directly by the communist party, it is no surprise that the debate about its fate sparked political controversies, too. Even art historians themselves, especially the older ones, found it difficult to separate architecture from (memory) politics. To Petr Kratochvíl, Hotel Praha represented one of the most important power centres of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia.[240] Zdeněk Lukeš, too, admitted that "given the political context, our generation may have been too biased in relation to these buildings."[241] Yet according to Milena Bartlová, it is precisely the "political" nature of the hotel – besides its architectural quality – that makes it worth preserving. Without Hotel Praha, it is much more difficult "to demonstrate how powerful the [communist] party was,"[242] argued Bartlová. Moreover, the hotel also embodied "the hypocrisy of the communist regime," the aforementioned conflict between "the proclaimed egalitarianism, and the creation of VIP conditions" for its own political elite.[243]

Ultimately, however, the historical link between the hotel and the communist party represented a burden rather than an advantage in the public debate. It allowed the critics of the hotel, especially journalists, to label it as *Hotel Bolshevik*[244] or *communist bunker*.[245]

[240] Next to the Palace of Culture near Vyšehrad, and the communist party headquarters in a historical building on the Vltava embankment. Kratochvíl, interview.
[241] Lukeš, interview.
[242] Kracík, interview, February 2, 2021.
[243] Karous, interview.
[244] Jiří X. Doležal, "Hotel Praha je hnusnej a měl by se zbourat!," *Reflex*, July 1, 2013, https://www.reflex.cz/clanek/komentare/50980/jiri-x-dolezal-hotel-praha-je-hnusnej-a-mel-by-se-zbourat.html.
[245] Švec, "Hotel Praha je komunistický kryt, bude se těžko bořit, říká architekt."

3.2.3 Illicit moneychanger destroys Prague: Hotel Praha as a symbol of failed transformation

With regards to the involvement of the general public, there was a stark contrast between the Liberec case (2005–2009) and the demolition of Hotel Praha (2013–2014). While the Liberec public remained largely indifferent, civil society in Prague played a crucial role in the dispute over the fate of Hotel Praha. "Cultivated ladies of retirement age, moms with baby carriages, hipsters, left-leaning people connected to the ecological movement, along with local residents," describes Karous the diverse mix of people who stood up to preserve the hotel.[246] At the same time, however, it is obvious that the actual driving force behind the protests was a group of art and philosophy students,[247] together with several art historians, especially Bartlová, Zikmund-Lender and Karous, and a few other sympathizers.

The involvement of art students also influenced the nature of the protests. Vasil Artamonov and Alexey Klyuykov,[248] as well as other young artists, including Pavel Karous himself, created several original posters and leaflets, thus contributing to the unique atmosphere of the demonstrations and happenings. The protests were usually accompanied by public lectures and discussions, often with a personal participation of the architects and designers of Hotel Praha.[249] Most of the demonstrations took place in the spring and summer of 2013. They included two protests in front of the PPF headquarters, each of which was joined by approximately hundred people,[250] one smaller gathering at the Ministry of Culture, and one

[246] Karous, interview.
[247] Mostly from the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University (FFUK), the Academy of Fine Arts (AVU), and the Academy of Performing Arts (AMU), as one of the co-organizers of the protests, then student of FAMU and FFUK, told me. Kateřina Krejčová, interview by Filip Rambousek, February 5, 2021, Praha.
[248] Both Artamonov and Klyuykov received the prestigious Jindřich Chalupecký Award for young visual artists in 2010, i.e. shortly before their involvement in the 2013 protests.
[249] In addition, pre-recorded interviews with the architects and designers of the hotel were screened during the protests. Krejčová, interview.
[250] Třeček, "Stovka Lidí Protestovala Proti Plánovanému Bourání Hotelu Praha."

artistic happening right at the hotel.[251] During this performance, a small group of protesters hung a giant poster with the inscription "illicit moneychanger destroys Prague" on the hotel wall.[252]

One of the demonstrations at the PPF headquarter included a performative element, too, albeit somewhat unexpected (from the perspective of the organizers). Several people, disguised as Brezhnev, Husák and other prominent communist leaders, suddenly appeared at the protest. They wore paper masks with portraits of these politicians, and carried a placard reading "comrades, let's save Hotel Praha."[253] In doing so, they probably aimed to portray the protesters as proponents of the pre-1989 regime, and thus "discredit [the protest] in the eyes of the liberal media."[254] And it seems that this strategy worked very well. The mainstream media indeed considered the people in masks to be ordinary protesters. For instance, the online news portal iDnes reported that their presence was supposed to "evoke the period during which precisely such people used to meet at Hotel Praha."[255] In reality, however, the whole performance with the masks was most likely staged and financed by PPF.[256]

The actual protesters joined the demonstrations not to defend the postwar communist regime but to support the preservation of architecturally valuable building. Yet it is true that the dispute over Hotel Praha evolved from an expert debate into a political one. "For the liberal right, the hotel became a symbol of communism, for us it symbolized the fight against capitalist

[251] The overview and time frame of the protests is based on the information provided to me by the organizers themselves. Krejčová, interview; Karous, interview.
[252]The term "illicit moneychanger" refers to the dubious beginning of Peter Kellner's business career at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. Short video report capturing the happening is available online. Mikuláš Klang, "Nebourejte Hotel Praha! Lidé protestovali proti demolici hnízda papalášů," *iDnes.cz*, June 30, 2013, https://www.idnes.cz/praha/zpravy/protest-proti-bourani-hotelu-praha.A130630_121804_praha-zpravy_klm.
[253] See a short video report from the demonstration here: Třeček, "Stovka Lidí Protestovala Proti Plánovanému Bourání Hotelu Praha."
[254] Karous, interview. Compare with Karous, "Provozování Hotelu Praha 2002-2014," 211.
[255] Třeček, "Stovka Lidí Protestovala Proti Plánovanému Bourání Hotelu Praha."
[256] Pavel Karous saw these people going from the protest directly to the PPF reception desk where they changed their clothes and received financial compensation for their engagement. Karous, interview.

oligarchy," one of the protesters told me.[257] In other words, for a substantial part of the protesters, especially for the art and philosophy students, the demonstrations also represented an opportunity to express criticism towards the then government, and point to the "failed transformation."[258] This also helps explain why the protesters decided to name their initiative *Illicit moneychanger destroys Prague*, a title that refers to the dubious way Peter Kellner became the richest Czech. Furthermore, given the fact that Hotel Praha was built and demolished without the civil society having a say in it, some of the protesters suggested to turn the hotel into a museum in which the arrogance of both normalization and post-1989 elites would be thematized.[259]

3.3 Transgas: Non-Socialist Architecture or Arrogant Political Gesture of the Communist Regime?

3.3.1 Controlling the natural gas transit between East and West

The set of buildings known as Transgas belongs to the most prominent architectural projects of the 1960s and 1970s in Czechoslovakia. One of the reasons for that is the central location of the complex within the city of Prague – between the historic building of the National Museum and the functionalist building of the Czech Radio, near Wenceslas Square. The strategic importance of Transgas was further underlined by its core function, i.e. the control of natural gas transit from the Soviet Union to western Europe.

[257] Krejčová, interview.
[258] Krejčová. According to Krejčová, many of the protesters also participated in other anti-governmental demonstrations between 2010 and 2013, including the protest against the introduction of tuition fees. Krejčová, interview.
[259] One of the co-organizers of the protests against the demolition, Kateřina Krejčová, spoke about „a museum of failed transformation." Krejčová.

The plot designated for Transgas was, indeed, very specific, not only due to the proximity of the historic center of Prague, but also with regards to the surrounding infrastructure. Its architects had to take into account both the railway tunnel that leads directly under the plot as well as the then emerging north-south highway – *Magistrála* – that was supposed to pass directly around Transgas.[260] At the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, the entire area around National Museum underwent a profound transformation, and many of the related commissions resulted from architectural competitions. In 1965/66, for instance, a competition for the new building of the federal parliament took place, closely followed (1966) by a two-round competition for the central gas control center. In the latter one, the bold project of Ivo Loos and Jindřich Malátak was eventually selected – out of 37 submitted proposals.[261]

In the following years (1966–1975), the project was further elaborated, its parameters slightly altered, and the architectural team extended by Jiří Eisenreich and Václav Aulický.[262] Despite all these changes, however, the basic concept from the late 1960s has been retained – a loose urban structure composed of several solitary buildings. Perhaps the most interesting of them was the technical building of the actual gas pipeline control center, which contained two giant computers. In order to protect the IT infrastructure from undesired vibrations caused by the railway tunnel, the whole building virtually floated several meters above the surface, being anchored to the ground in only four points.[263] The two administrative towers served the then

[260] For more details see Radomíra Sedláková, "Urbanistické souvislosti místa - historie, vize a realita," in *Transgas: Historie, architektura, památkový potenciál*, ed. Naďa Goryczková (Praha: Národní památkový ústav, 2019), 31–35; Lukáš Beran, "Transgas," *archiweb.cz*, accessed May 28, 2022, https://www.archiweb.cz/b/transgas-budovy-ustredniho-dispecinku-tranzitniho-plynovodu-federalniho-ministerstva-paliv-a-energetiky-a-svetove-odborove-federace.

[261] For more details about the competition see Lenka Popelová and Nikolay Brankov, "Soutěž na Ústřední plynárenský dispečink v Praze," in *Transgas: Historie, architektura, památkový potenciál*, ed. Naďa Goryczková (Praha: Národní památkový ústav, 2019), 37–51.

[262] For more details about the development of the project between 1966 and 1975 see Popelová and Brankov; Václav Aulický, "Typologická výjimečnost stavby v kontextu doby a historického prostředí," in *Transgas: Historie, architektura, památkový potenciál*, ed. Naďa Goryczková (Praha: Národní památkový ústav, 2019), 69–87; Beran, "Transgas."

[263] Aulický, "Typologická výjimečnost stavby v kontextu doby a historického prostředí," 75; Beran, "Transgas."

Federal Ministry of Fuel and Energy. These high-rise buildings,[264] too, were marked by technological invention, for example the "suspended double-skin facade made of reflective glass."[265] The entire Transgas complex consisted of a number of remarkable details – from individual interior design to tunnel connections between the three buildings in the form of gas pipeline.[266]

Another characteristic feature of the architecture of Transgas was the distinct use of materials, more precisely the emphasis on raw materials such as raw concrete (*béton brut*), weathering steel, or granite – 18.000 ordinary Prague granite cobblestones were used as cladding material for the facade of the control center.[267] This is also why the term *brutalism* appears so often in relation to Transgas.[268] Václav Aulický, one of the coauthors of the complex, mentioned the influence of the then contemporary "brutalist and high-tech architecture, especially from England and France."[269] In other words, the architects of Transgas sought inspiration in the west, either through Czech as well as foreign architectural journals or during their travels abroad – between 1967 and 1969 they visited France, Germany, Sweden and Finland.[270]

With the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, however, the situation changed dramatically, especially for Ivo Loos and Jindřich Malátek who were actively involved in the Prague Spring, and later, in 1970, designed the tombstone of Jan Palach.[271] Even though they

[264] The height of the two administrative towers was, however, strictly limited to some 34 meters – due to the proximity of the National Museum. Veronika Vicherková, "Akce Transgas: čeká unikátní stavbu demolice?," *Věstník Klubu Za starou Prahu* 45 (16), no. 2 (2015): 11.
[265] Vicherková, 11.
[266] The same witty solution was applied to the exterior railings. For an overview of the qualities of Transgas see Veronika Vicherková, "Návrh na prohlášení za kulturní památku: Transgas," 2015, https://www.zastarouprahu.cz/webdata/40B309B0-ABB3-414D-A856-65BD37D9EB06.pdf (accessed 1.6.2022).
[267] The number 18.000 taken over from Beran, "Transgas". For more details about the use of materials see Aulický, "Typologická výjimečnost stavby v kontextu doby a historického prostředí," 83.
[268] See for instance Švácha, interview, July 27, 2020; Vicherková, "Akce Transgas: čeká unikátní stavbu demolice?"
[269] Aulický, "Typologická výjimečnost stavby v kontextu doby a historického prostředí," 83.
[270] Aulický, 78.
[271] Vicherková, "Návrh na prohlášení za kulturní památku: Transgas."

were allowed to complete the strategically significant project of Transgas, it could not be published in architectural journals.[272]

The construction of the Transgas complex took place between 1972 and 1978.[273] Since then, it served as an important control center for the management of gas transit as well as a seat of the Ministry of Fuel and Energy. Shortly after the Velvet Revolution, however, Transgas lost its original function. Whereas the two glass towers got under the administration of the nearby Federal Assembly, the technical building of the gas pipeline control center was transformed first into a Mercedes-Benz showroom (1991–92) and later into a headquarters of the public insurance company VZP.[274] In the meanwhile (2001), the whole complex was privatized and in 2014 acquired by a development company HB Reavis, which immediately started to strive for its demolition.[275]

3.3.2 From non-socialist architecture to arrogant political gesture of the communist regime

Until 2015, "nobody was really interested in Transgas."[276] In a way, the group of late modernist buildings had a difficult fate from the very beginning. It was not so much thematized in the media and/or architectural magazines before 1989 because two of its four authors were considered *persona non grata*[277] in the post-1968 regime and their buildings were not allowed

[272] Vicherková; for more details about the post-1968 reality in the field of architecture see Radomíra Sedláková and Václav Aulický, "Dobové ohlasy," in *Transgas: Historie, architektura, památkový potenciál*, ed. Naďa Goryczková (Praha: Národní památkový ústav, 2019), 115; Jakub Potůček, "Jindřich Malátek, Ivo Loos a Václav Aulický," in *Architektura 58-89*, ed. Vladimír 518, Book 2 (Praha: BigBoss, 2022), 482.
[273] Beran, "Transgas."
[274] Jakub Panovský, "VIDEO: budova Transgas je obdivovaná i nenáviděná," *ESTAV.cz* (blog), October 10, 2018, https://www.estav.cz/cz/6859.video-budova-transgas-je-obdivovana-i-nenavidena; "4.12.2017 / SOS Transgas: protest proti demolici," *Artalk.cz* (blog), December 3, 2017, https://artalk.cz/2017/12/03/4-12-2017-sos-transgas-protest-proti-demolici/.
[275] "4.12.2017 / SOS Transgas: Protest Proti Demolici."
[276] Naďa Goryczková, "Úvod," in *Transgas: Historie, architektura, památkový potenciál*, ed. Naďa Goryczková (Praha: Národní památkový ústav, 2019), 12.
[277] Art historian Rostislav Švácha used this term in an interview with me. Švácha, interview, July 27, 2020.

to be published. This "information embargo" was broken only a few times,[278] for instance in 1974 when the Transgas complex was "marked by the (normalization) Union of Architects as a 'typical example of non-socialist architecture.'"[279]

However, the situation changed fundamentally in 2015 when the new owner of Transgas presented his plan to tear down all the buildings and replace them with a new administrative complex. At that point, the developer probably did not anticipate that the aim to demolish Transgas would result in perhaps "the largest public debate on the protection of postwar architecture so far," as the preservationist Matyáš Kracík put it.[280]

The first response came from the Club for the old Prague whose members promptly put together an official request to the Ministry of Culture to declare Transgas a cultural monument.[281] The subsequent protracted dispute took several years and was joined not only by responsible state institutions and the developer, but also by many individual art historians and civil society organizations. This is also why the Transgas case attracted such a strong media attention throughout the years.[282]

For many art historians and preservationists, Transgas represented "a unique and groundbreaking piece of work (…), both from an architectural and constructional point of view."[283] Thus, the two expert committees (of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage Institute) recommended to declare the brutalist complex a cultural monument. In addition to the

[278] For more details about the perception of Transgas before 1989 see: Sedláková and Aulický, "Dobové ohlasy," 115–17.
[279] Václav Aulický, "Komentář Václava Aulického k problematice demolice areálu," in *Transgas: Historie, architektura, památkový potenciál*, ed. Naďa Goryczková (Praha: Národní památkový ústav, 2019), 174.
[280] Matyáš Kracík, "Hodnocení z hlediska památkové péče," in *Transgas: Historie, architektura, památkový potenciál*, ed. Naďa Goryczková (Praha: Národní památkový ústav, 2019), 149.
[281] Vicherková, "Návrh na prohlášení za kulturní památku: Transgas."
[282] See an incomplete list of media contributions on the Transgas case in 2015–2017, i.e. during the first two years of the public debate. "Soubor staveb Transgas," *zastarouprahu.cz*, accessed June 5, 2022, https://www.zastarouprahu.cz/soubor-staveb-transgas/kauza-56/.
[283] Here I am citing from the recommendation of the expert committee of the Ministry of Culture from February 2016. The text of the recommendation can be found here, on page nr. 3: Eva Trejbalová, "Rozhodnutí Ministerstva kultury o neprohlášení souboru Transgas za kulturní památku," November 30, 2016, https://www.zastarouprahu.cz/webdata/776C88ED-432F-4F40-B98E-EF33B6D0F410.pdf.

remarkable architecture, both committees also appreciated the "design of public space that was conceived (…) as a system of multilevel terraces"[284] and therefore "occupies an important place in the history of postwar Czechoslovak urban planning."[285]

At the same time, however, it was precisely the urban design that received the most criticism. A number of art historians and preservationists considered the urbanism of Transgas unsuitable because it did not respect the urban character of the Vinohrady district, which consists of residential blocks. The art historian Pavel Halík, for instance, spoke of "anti-urban concept",[286] the Ministry of Culture argued in its 2016 decision that Transgas did not fit into the "organism of the city."[287] The critics of Transgas have, according to the preservationist Matyáš Kracík, portrayed the complex as a "disparate, alien element, disturbing the quiet residential blocks of Vinohrady, a result of the faulty planning of the previous regime."[288]

In other words, there is a fine line between an art historical evaluation of a certain building and an ideological critique of the political regime the building was constructed in. It is obvious that this fine line has been often crossed, sometimes even by the state authorities. The Department of Heritage Preservation of the Prague City Council, for instance, claimed in its statement from 2016 that "the urban concept [of Trangas] represented a conscious attempt of the socialist era (…) to ideologically (…) suppress or 'surpass' the characteristic built environment from the older period."[289]

[284] The citation comes from the recommendation of the expert committee of the Ministry of Culture from February 2016. The text of the recommendation can be found here, on page nr. 3: Trejbalová.
[285] The citation comes from the recommendation of the committee of the National Heritage Institute for the protection of postwar architecture from August 2016. The text of the recommendation can be found here, on pages nr. 5 and 6: Trejbalová.
[286] Besides Pavel Halík, a few other art historians and architects supported the demolition Transgas, for instance Zdeněk Lukeš, Vladimír Šlapeta and Eva Jiřičná. For more details about their involvement see Kracík, "Hodnocení z hlediska památkové péče," 150.
[287] Trejbalová, "Rozhodnutí Ministerstva kultury o neprohlášení souboru Transgas za kulturní památku," 7.
[288] Kracík, "Hodnocení z hlediska památkové péče," 150.
[289] The full text of the statement can be found here, on pages 4 and 5: Trejbalová, "Rozhodnutí ministerstva kultury o neprohlášení souboru Transgas za kulturní památku."

Similar argumentation also appeared in many newspaper articles and commentaries. The diplomat, translator and journalist Petr Janyška, for example, perceived Transgas as a "manifestation of the ideology of the old regime," as an "arrogant political gesture of the Husákian [i.e. normalization] era."[290] The well-known writer Ondřej Neff, too, spoke about Transgas in predominantly ideological terms. He interpreted the very construction of Transgas as a symbolic "revenge" on the then Czechoslovak Radio for its critical broadcasting in August 1968.[291]

Such arguments, together with the overall poor condition of the building complex, made it easier for the developer to present its project as an attempt to "rehabilitate the character of the [disrupted] urban structure of Vinohrady,"[292] and to replace "a piece of the city that does not live"[293] with a new set of buildings that will – unlike Transgas – "respect the street line"[294] and provide the citizens of Prague with a pleasant courtyard with greenery, cafés and restaurants.[295] Besides that, the developer pointed out the limited usability of the whole complex. Given the specificity of Transgas, it would be extremely difficult – if not impossible – to use the existing buildings in an economically profitable way.[296]

It should be also emphasized that the development company HB Reavis belongs to the richest Slovak Ivan Chrenko.[297] Thus, it does not surprise that, as in the previous two cases, the

[290] Petr Janyška, "Normalizační moloch v srdci Vinohrad: Transgas," Aktuálně.cz (blog), February 27, 2019, https://blog.aktualne.cz/blogy/petr-janyska.php?itemid=33518.
[291] Ondřej Neff, "Pomsta rozhlasu za srpen," Glosa Plus (blog), February 4, 2019, https://plus.rozhlas.cz/ondrej-neff-pomsta-rozhlasu-za-srpen-7753593.
[292] In this paragraph, I am citing excerpts from a public appearance of the CEO of the development company HB Reavis Petr Herman. Architektura 489, *Panelová diskuze SOS Transgas*, panel discussion (Praha, 2017), 1:47:20, https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=20s38n8P2ow.
[293] *Panelová diskuze SOS Transgas*, 11:23.
[294] *Panelová diskuze SOS Transgas*, 1:47:28.
[295] *Panelová diskuze SOS Transgas*, 1:49:22.
[296] See interview with the CEO of the development company. Hana Bořiková, "Šéf HB Reavis pro Česko Herman: Praha je jakýmsi skanzenem," *Euro.cz*, October 1, 2017, https://www.euro.cz/byznys/sef-hb-reavis-pro-cesko-herman-praha-je-jakymsi-skanzenem-1374091; The gas pipeline control center has no windows and also the two administrative towers use the space in an extremely inefficient way, explains the CEO of HB Reavis in a public debate. *Panelová diskuze SOS Transgas*, 36:16.
[297] "Najbohatší Slováci 2021: Na čele je Ivan Chrenko z HB Reavisu, hoci schudobnel," *Forbes Slovensko*, October 5, 2021, https://www.forbes.sk/najbohatsi-slovaci-2021-na-cele-je-ivan-chrenko-z-hb-reavisu-hoci-schudobnel/.

economic strength of the investor influenced the nature of the legal dispute over Transgas. If such a powerful company threatens the state to claim financial compensation from it (in the case that Transgas receives the legal status of cultural monument), then it becomes even more difficult for the ministry to make an independent decision based on expert recommendations.[298] It was in the light of these circumstances that the ministry of culture eventually decided not to declare Transgas a cultural monument, and thus paved the way for its demolition.[299]

3.3.3 SOS Transgas: the colorful civic life around Transgas

The aforementioned legal dispute and expert discussion were from the very beginning accompanied by a lively public debate. In comparison with the protests against the demolition of Hotel Praha, the civic initiatives around Transgas were noticeably more numerous as well as diverse: numerous in terms of the number of initiatives and individuals involved, and diverse in terms of the typology of organizations, associations and individuals involved. The traditional, 1900 established Club for the old Prague[300] defended Transgas along with the young civic association Architektura 489,[301] the association Prázdné domy (empty houses),[302] the initiative around Libeňský most[303] or the Prague political movement Praha Sobě – one of its members, Martin Benda, became a spokesperson of the umbrella organization SOS Transgas.

[298] The financial compensations would probably reach several hundred million Czech crowns, i.e. several million euros. Kracík, "Hodnocení z hlediska památkové péče," 152–53.
[299] Kracík, "Hodnocení z hlediska památkové péče," 153.
See also the full text of the ministerial decision. Trejbalová, "Rozhodnutí ministerstva kultury o neprohlášení souboru Transgas za kulturní památku."
[300] For more information about the long history of the Club see Bečková, *Sto let Klubu Za starou Prahu*.
[301] The project Architektura 489 is run by a group of postwar architecture fans who put together a database of valuable postwar buildings in Czechia. For more details see *Architektura 489*, https://www.a489.cz/.
[302] The association Prázdné domy creates and manages a database of „empty houses", i.e. buildings that are not used and/or are in poor condition and/or are threatened with demolition. For more details see *Prázdné domy*, https://prazdnedomy.cz/.
[303] The aim of the initiative was to prevent the demolition of Libeňský most from 1928. In contrast to the Transgas case, the initiative eventually succeeded. For more details see Adam Scheinherr, "Libeňský most nebourat, nerozšiřovat," https://www.facebook.com/libenskymost/.

Despite their different backgrounds, political orientations, main foci etc., all of these initiatives joined their forces in order to prevent the demolition of Transgas. "Since this was not the first case of its kind, everything came together," one of the organizers of the protests, Lukáš Veverka, explained to me.[304] Veverka himself belonged to the most active members of the informal organizational team, consisting mainly of art history students from the Charles University, architecture students from the Czech Technical University, and representatives of the above mentioned civic associations.[305]

Together, they organized many public events, most of which took place directly at Transgas between 2017 and 2019. During this time, several guided tours of the complex were organized, often in the presence of the architect Aulický.[306] One guided tour in April 2017, for instance, was attended by some 300 people.[307] The protest gatherings, too, attracted a considerable attention of the public as well as the media, especially the two large demonstrations in December 2017 and February 2019, both of which were joined by some 200 people.[308] In addition to that, several panel discussions on this subject took place.[309]

Shortly after the first large demonstration in December 2017, Transgas was – for a few moments – shrouded in red smoke. By means of this happening, a group of young artists called Bolt 958 wanted to draw attention to the intended replacement of the complex of "immense architectural value" with "unified office spaces."[310] Similar arguments could be heard at the two large demonstrations, too. The speakers usually underlined the architectural qualities of

[304] Lukáš Veverka, interview by Filip Rambousek, January 28, 2021, Praha.
[305] This information, too, comes from Veverka who studied art history at Charles University at that time. Veverka.
[306] According to Lukáš Veverka, approximately five public guided tours of Transgas took place. Veverka.
[307] Petr Sojka, "Akce pro Transgas," *Z metropole*, April 8, 2017, https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/10116288835-z-metropole/217411058230014/cast/536035/.
[308] Jan Kuliš, "Nesahejte nám na Transgas, vzkázali na dálku protestující ministru Hermanovi," *Deník Referendum*, December 5, 2017, https://denikreferendum.cz/clanek/26651-nesahejte-nam-na-transgas-vzkazali-na-dalku-protestujici-ministru-hermanovi; "Půjde Transgas definitivně k zemi?"
[309] Perhaps the biggest reach had the panel discussion that took place in the Federal Assembly in April 2017. *Panelová Diskuze SOS Transgas*.
[310] Cited from a facebook post by Bolt 958. Bolt 958, "Transgas hoří," *Bolt 958* (blog), December 20, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=Bolt958boys&set=a.1822841061122800.

Transgas and criticized the role of public institutions, especially the Department of Heritage Preservation of the Prague City Council and the Ministry of Culture. During a little theater performance at the 2019 protest, the character representing the then minister of culture ironically proposed to create a new ministerial department, namely a "Department for the Protection of Developers' Interests."[311]

In fact, the critique of developers' power – in contrast to the weakness and incompetence of state institutions in the field of heritage preservation – dominated the protests. At the same time, the socialist past as such was not so much thematized by the protesters. "I look at these buildings from the perspective of art history. I am free of an ideological point of view. (…) Perhaps it's because I was born after the revolution. (…) It means I don't have that emotional experience, my own experience [with state socialism]," explains Veverka what enables him to keep some distance from the ideological dimension of the debate.[312] The civic association Architektura 489, too, puts ideology aside and focuses solely on architectural qualities since the postwar Czechoslovak architecture "often suffers from being labeled as socialist."[313]

Even though Transgas was eventually demolished in 2019,[314] the whole case attracted considerable media attention between 2015 and 2019. The aforementioned protests, guided tours, panel discussions, happenings and other events were widely reflected in the media, including the main news program of the Czech TV. To an extent, Transgas has also become part of popular culture.[315] As a result, the intensive debate on Transgas significantly contributed to the "gradual change of public's attitude towards postwar architecture," believes Kracík.[316]

[311] Kuliš, "Nesahejte nám na Transgas, vzkázali na dálku protestující ministru Hermanovi."
[312] Veverka, interview.
[313] "Architektura 489."
[314] The demolition took 9 months. Anna Kottová, "VIDEO: Podívejte se, jak šel Transgas za devět měsíců k zemi. Novou budovu čekají změny, přibudou byty," *iRozhlas*, April 1, 2020, https://www.irozhlas.cz/kultura/transgas-praha-budova-demolice-video-architekt-novy-projekt-jakub-cigler_2004010705_ako.
[315] Not only tote bags and badges with a picture of Transgas were made and sold, but even socks. "Brutální ponožky feat. A489," *V páru* (e-shop), https://www.vparu.cz/product-category/a489/.
[316] Kracík, "Hodnocení z Hlediska Památkové Péče," 154.

Moreover, the strong involvement of civil society actors has certainly increased the pressure both on state institutions as well as developers.[317]

[317] Compare with Kracík, 154.

DISCUSSION

Looking at the three demolitions, one trend is evident at first glance: the increasing interest and involvement of the general public in the debate on postwar architecture. Whereas the public discussion about the Ještěd department store in Liberec (2005–2009) was limited to a rather narrow circle of experts, in case of Transgas (2015–2019), several civic organizations and initiatives with various backgrounds came together in order to save the brutalist complex from demolition. This is why Jiří Křížek believes that „if the demolition [of the Ještěd department store] came today, i.e. more than ten years later, (…) the younger generation would already make itself felt."[318]

In fact, the architecture of socialism became much more popular over the last 10–15 years, partly also in consequence of the three demolitions. It took some time even for professional preservationists to fully recognize and acknowledge the specific values of postwar architecture. "When I joined the National Heritage Institute some ten years ago [in 2012], there was no interest in this architecture at all," recalls one of the preservationists from the younger generation Kracík.[319] In the meantime, however, the perception of postwar architecture within the institute gradually changed, certainly also thanks to the extensive research project on the architecture of the 1960s and 1970s initiated by the director Naděžda Goryzcková in 2015.[320]

At the same time, several successful exhibition and book projects on this subject emerged in the last few years, for instance the exhibition *Iconic ruins* (2019) that compared the fate of postwar architecture in the four Visegrad countries,[321] the exhibition *NO*

[318] Křížek, interview.
[319] Matyáš Kracík, interview by Filip Rambousek, February 2, 2021, Praha.
[320] Goryczková, interview. The research project resulted – besides other outcomes – in several monographs on postwar architecture. See the list of project outcomes: "Architektura 60. a 70. let: výstupy projektu" (Národní památkový ústav), https://www.ma6070.cz/cs/vystupy.
[321] The exhibition catalogue is available online. See Henrieta Moravčíková and Petr Vorlík, eds., *Iconic Ruins? Post-War Socialist Architecture in the Visegrad Countries* (Czech Centres, 2019), https://www.sharedcities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Iconic-Ruins_catalog_screen.pdf.

DEMOLITIONS! (2020) that focused on the brutalist architecture in Prague,[322] or the ambitious two-book project *Architektura 58–89* (2022) put together by a rap musician Vladimír 518.[323] In other words, "the debate is changing because it is being joined by young people," as the art historian Milena Bartlová put it.[324] We might add that the debate has been joined not only by the younger generation, but also by people with non-academic background.

With new actors entering the stage, the character of the debate has changed, too. New forms of protests emerged, which could be observed especially in case of Hotel Praha and Transgas, and younger scholars enriched the debate with new types of argumentation. Instead of focusing solely on the architectural qualities and historical significance of the respective building, they also draw attention to values like "ecology (…), diversity of architecture(s) in the city" and "plurality,"[325] i.e. values that are threatened by the gradual disappearance of the architectural heritage of socialism.

In contrast to these changes, one thing remained the same: the economic power of the owner, which played a decisive role in all three cases. The argumentation of those in favor of demolition has not changed much either. The supporters of demolition usually pointed out that the respective building did not allow the owner to generate profit because it did not utilize the plot in an economically efficient way.[326] Therefore, the argument went on, there was no other option than demolition. In addition to that, the proponents of demolition (sometimes in

[322] A brief description of the exhibition is available online. Helena Doudová, "NO DEMOLITIONS! Forms of Brutalism in Prague," 2020, https://www.ngprague.cz/en/event/254/no-demolitions-forms-of-brutalism-in-prague.
[323] Alena Rokosová, "Kniha jako projev aktivismu. Architektura 58-89 vypráví příběh předrevolučních staveb a je plná dosud nepublikovaných snímků," *Mozaika*, March 21, 2022, https://vltava.rozhlas.cz/kniha-jako-projev-aktivismu-architektura-58-89-vypravi-pribeh-predrevolucnich-8706147.
[324] Milena Bartlová, interview by Filip Rambousek, August 24, 2020, Praha.
[325] Petr Vorlík, interview by Filip Rambousek, August 12, 2020, Praha.
[326] The critics also often pointed to the obsolete technical equipment.

accordance with state officials) often referred to the alleged right of the owner to do "whatever [he] wants" with a building once he acquired it.[327]

"If you want to save it, buy it,"[328] an advice that the young architecture historian Klára Brůhová heard many times from her opponents. According to Brůhová, the Czech discourse is (still) dominated by the idea that "private property is inviolable."[329] As a result, "the private interest of the owner takes precedence over the public interest (…). The erosion of public interest is a permanent trend of the last thirty years. This is, in my eyes, the main reason why we fail to protect these buildings," believes Švácha.[330] His assessment is very similar to the observations of the historian Michal Kopeček who sees a direct connection between the ongoing "erosion of public interest" and the nature of the post-socialist transformation. In fact, the thorough economic transformation, strongly influenced by the principles of neoliberalism, was presented by its proponents as the only way to "radically cut itself off from the communist past,"[331] a turn that resulted in a strong emphasis on "individual initiative"[332] and contributed to the narrow understanding of "freedom construed as an absolute subjective will."[333]

In such societal atmosphere, it is, indeed, not easy to call for better protection of the architecture of socialism. As Klára Brůhová noted, the conditions will most probably not change, unless "the value orientations in the whole society change. A broader discussion is needed. (…) It is not only about architecture."[334]

[327] Here I once again quote the 2013 statement of the then Minister of Culture Jiří Balvín. Balvín, Ministr Balvín nebude bránit demolici domu na Václavském náměstí ani Hotelu Praha.
[328] Klára Brůhová and Veronika Vicherková, interview by Filip Rambousek, August 11, 2020, Praha.
[329] Brůhová and Vicherková.
[330] Švácha, interview, July 27, 2020.
[331] Kopeček, "Úvod: Expertní kořeny postsocialismu: výzkumné perspektivy a metodologické nástroje," 16.
[332] Kopeček, 16.
[333] Milena Bartlová, "Zbořte ty komunistické baráky! Socialismus a modernita mezi pamětí a zapomínáním," in *Sametová budoucnost?*, ed. Petr Drulák and Petr Agha (Praha: Masarykova demokratická společnost, Burian a Tichák, 2019), 60.
[334] Brůhová and Vicherková, interview.

To what extent has the debate on postwar architecture been influenced by the (predominantly) negative image of the socialist past? Can the gradual disappearance of postwar architecture be interpreted as a way of *active forgetting* (as defined by Aleida Assmann)?

Based on my analysis, I came to the conclusion that the gradual disappearance of the architectural heritage of socialism lacks the necessary intentionality to regard it as a consequence of active memory politics of the Czech state or some other actor. In my understanding, the demolitions should be rather seen as a result of a combination of factors, most importantly the prevailing pro-market discourse in Czechia, along with the state institutions' weakness, incompetence[335] and unwillingness to protect postwar architecture. Lack of activity and coherent policy rather than an intention. However, the outcome is practically the same as if there was a deliberate plan to eliminate the most innovative and architecturally valuable buildings from the 1960s and 1970s, which makes the interpretation even more challenging.

Active forgetting is compared by Aleida Assmann to "intentional acts such as trashing and destroying."[336] In contrast, *passive forgetting* implies "non-intentional acts such as (…) neglecting, abandoning (…), the objects are not materially destroyed."[337] As we can see, the fate of the architectural heritage of socialism does not really fit into this scheme. It cannot be interpreted as solely active or passive form of forgetting. On the one hand, substantial part of the most valuable postwar architecture has been, in fact, destroyed over the last three decades, on the other hand, this physical elimination of a nearly entire architectonic layer was neither intended nor planned or carried out by the state. In case of the three demolitions, however, the ministry of culture decided not to declare the buildings a cultural monument, and thus de facto

[335] The weakness and incompetence of state institutions in the area of heritage preservation is also related to the nature of the post-socialist transformation. See chapter II.
[336] Assmann, "Canon and Archive," 334.
[337] Assmann, 334.

authorized their demolition,[338] which brings these cases somewhat closer to the definition of *active forgetting*.

Even though it is not easy to conceptually interpret the fate of 'socialist' architecture in the post-socialist Czechia, it is obvious that in comparison with the built heritage from other historical periods, i.e. from the First Czechoslovak Republic, the postwar architecture has one big disadvantage – the relation to the communist regime. How much of a burden did it pose for the three buildings analyzed in this thesis? In other words, to what extent has the dominant narrative of the communist past manifested itself in the public debate on the architectural heritage of socialism?

The analysis has shown that the extent to which the communist past (of the respective building) influenced the debate depended mostly on the (hi)story of the given building, and not so much on the time frame of the debate. This helps us understand why the Ještěd department store in Liberec was not confronted with ideological critique at all, while Hotel Praha (and its supporters) had to deal with ideological arguments all the time. As we have seen, the owner of Hotel Praha even tried to portray the protesters as proponents of the communist regime. In case of Transgas, its relation to the communist past was thematized, too, often in a very superficial and misleading way. For instance, the link between the architecture of Transgas and the normalization era is not so simple and straightforward as depicted by some critics.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the three buildings were not demolished for ideological reasons, due to their link with the communist regime, but primarily for economic reasons. The communist past of these buildings 'only' gave the proponents of demolition a welcome opportunity to discredit the respective building as well as the efforts to save it. In

[338] Even though the representatives of the ministry of culture often repeat that the ministry does not decide on the demolition itself but only on the status of cultural monument. Jiří Vajčner and Jiří Slavík, interview by Filip Rambousek, January 26, 2021, Praha.

some cases, the possibility of making use of the ideological argument was rather limited (Ještěd), in other cases, the critics were able to utilize it quite extensively (Hotel Praha, partly also Transgas). To some extent, the ideological argument also penetrated ministerial and other official documents, which indicates that even professional preservationists and state officials, especially from the older generation, "cannot detach themselves from the connection of postwar architecture with the political regime."[339] This is evident also in the official documents on Transgas from 2015–2017, as the respective chapter has demonstrated.

Yet what does this tell us about the broader debate on the communist past in contemporary Czechia? First of all, we can see that for some actors, especially for older preservationists, art historians as well as laymen, it is (still) difficult to overcome the simplified black and white perception of the communist past, which makes it impossible for them to see the complexity and ambiguity of the three buildings' (hi)stories I tried to portray in this thesis. As a result, they are unable to focus solely on architectural qualities of the respective building, for their assessment of postwar architecture is influenced by ideology, more precisely, by their own experience with the communist regime.[340] This indicates that while the topic of the communist past might be seemingly "moving to the margins of political debate,"[341] it has not become completely insignificant (yet). Quite to the contrary, topics related to the communist past still have the weight to significantly influence the public debate – not only on postwar architecture.[342]

At the same time, however, the debate on 'socialist' architecture changed profoundly since 2005. We can identify a gradual shift towards a more differentiated and self-reflective

[339] Švácha, interview, August 22, 2019.
[340] See for instance Petr Kratochvíl's assessment of the demolition of Hotel Praha in chapter III.
[341] Andělová, "The Sound of Silence."
[342] See, for instance, the ongoing debate on the Institute for the Study of Totalitaruian Regimes or the more general debate on the nature of normalization, which was especially strong during the summer of 2020. See Marek Švehla, "Lajkujeme normalizaci. Nová generace historiků mění pohled na dějiny: Češi prý měli komunismus radši, než se tvrdí," *Respekt*, August 9, 2020, https://www.respekt.cz/tydenik/2020/33/tema.

discussion that is being joined by new actors who don't have "that emotional experience"[343] with the communist regime and/or who are able to keep the necessary professional distance from their personal and family memories of communism. The same can be said about the turn in (Czech) historiography towards a more nuanced history of communism initiated by young historians like Michal Kopeček or Michal Pullmann around 2008. At about that time, various students' and other civic initiatives voiced "a moral critique of post-communist Czech democracy"[344] as well as the post-1989 transformation. Only a few years later, similar ethos dominated the protests against the demolition of Hotel Praha.

Despite this awakening, the last 10–15 years saw a gradual physical disappearance of a number of architecturally significant buildings form the postwar period. Many of them did not fit into the dominant narrative of the communist past since they embodied the (somewhat forgotten) diversity, originality and creativity of the then architectural production, and the capacity and ability of the socialist state to provide architects with sufficient resources and (at least partial) artistic freedom. Thus, the elimination of these buildings might also – in the long run – influence the way "next generations [will be able to] form an opinion of the communist" past.[345] If the majority of high-quality postwar architecture disappears, the possibility to remember the creative, westward-looking dimension of the communist past might be somewhat weakened.

[343] As the young art historian Lukáš Veverka put it. Veverka, interview.
[344] O'Dwyer, "Remembering, Not Commemorating, 1989: The Twenty-Year Anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic," 182–83.
[345] Lydia Coudroy de Lille and Miéna Guest, "Towards Banalization: Trans-Forming the Legacies of the Post-Socialist City," in *The Post-Socialist City: Continuity and Change in Urban Space and Imagery*, ed. Alfrun Kliems et al. (Berlin: Jovis, 2010), 51.

CONCLUSION

By focusing on three major public debates on the architectural heritage of socialism in post-socialist Czechia between 2005 and 2019, the thesis provides the academic literature, especially in the field of urban studies, memory studies, and nationalism studies, with valuable empirical data. In contrast to the existing literature that concentrates mostly on monuments, memorials and other highly symbolical objects, this thesis explored the potential of looking at politically (somewhat) less prominent but architecturally significant buildings from the socialist period. More precisely, it analyzed the expert and public discussion that aroused around the controversial demolition of the Ještěd department store in Liberec (2005–2009), Hotel Praha in Prague (2013–2014), and Transgas in Prague's city center (2015–2019).

The analysis has shown that even though the three demolitions were motivated primarily by economic reasons, the memory of the communist past, too, influenced the debates, albeit with varying intensity. The prevailing narrative of the socialist past in Czechia still rests on a rather simplified black and white image of communism as a forty years period of continuous totalitarian rule, imposed on Czechoslovakia from outside. This perception of the recent past manifested itself not only in the public debate,[346] especially on Hotel Praha and Transgas, but also in the argumentation of several art historians and preservationists, mostly from the older generation.[347] These findings give evidence that the anti-communist discourse of the 1990s remained influential until the late 2010s – despite frequent claims about its "gradual moving to the margins of political debate."[348]

[346] For instance, the diplomat, translator and journalist Petr Janyška described Transgas as an "arrogant political gesture of the Husákian [i.e. normalization] era." See Janyška, "Normalizační moloch v srdci Vinohrad: Transgas". Similarly, the journalist Jiří X. Doležal labeled Hotel Praha as "Hotel Bolshevik." See Doležal, "Hotel Praha je hnusnej a měl by se zbourat!"

[347] See especially the comments of the architecture historian Petr Kratochvíl about Hotel Praha (see chapter III). The ideological argument penetrated even some of the official documents of state heritage institutions, for instance the official statement of the Department of Heritage Preservation of the Prague City Council related to Transgas (see chapter III).

[348] Andělová, "The Sound of Silence."

Interestingly, the extent to which the 'ideological argument' had been applied depended mostly on the history of the respective building, and not so much on the time frame of the demolition. This helps us understand why Hotel Praha (2013–2014), and partly also Transgas (2015–2019), had to deal with ideological attacks rather frequently, while the Ještěd department store (2005–2009) did not face ideological critique at all.

To some extent, the 'economic argument', too, is connected to the communist past, more precisely to the transition from communism to democracy, from centrally planned economy to (free) market economy. The far-reaching economic transformation was widely perceived as a way to "radically cut itself off from the communist past,"[349] and resulted in a broad political (and societal) preference of the individual over the collective, private over public, market over regulation. This helps explain the strong emphasis on the rights of the owner throughout the debate.

In the course of time, the debate on postwar architecture changed significantly. The interest of scholars as well as laymen in the architectural heritage of socialism kept growing in the last 10–15 years. The debate was joined by many new actors, especially from the younger generation, which also changed the nature of the expert and public discussion. New forms of protests emerged, and young scholars enriched the debate with new types of argumentation. Instead of focusing solely on the architectural qualities of the respective building, they also draw attention to values like "ecology (…), diversity of architecture(s) in the city" and "plurality,"[350] i.e. values that are threatened by the gradual disappearance of the architectural heritage of socialism. This shift in the discussion has a generational dimension, too. The younger scholars and activists perceive the communist past differently than those who lived

[349] Kopeček, "Úvod: Expertní kořeny postsocialismu: výzkumné perspektivy a metodologické nástroje," 16.
[350] Vorlík, interview.

through it. Therefore, it is usually somewhat easier for them to keep the necessary professional distance from the political and ideological context of postwar architecture.

Despite the growing interest, however, the last three decades were marked by a gradual elimination of many architecturally significant buildings from the socialist period. Even though this process can hardly be regarded as an act of *active forgetting*,[351] it might still influence the way "next generations [will be able to] form an opinion of the communist" past.[352] Especially the future memory of the 1960s and 1970s might be seriously affected since a substantial part of the most innovative works of architecture from this period has already disappeared.

[351] For more detail see the discussion section.
[352] Coudroy de Lille and Guest, "Towards Banalization: Trans-Forming the Legacies of the Post-Socialist City," 51.

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