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IV

Socialism for Everybody?

ABSTRACT

The concept of a socialist state system was originally based on the idea of an egalitarian, caring society. But during the so-called normalisation era in Czechoslovakia (after the occupation in 1968) the reality rather deviated from the initial proclamations. The architecture of public buildings split roughly into two more or less independent and very different lines.

The first line is represented by politically high-profile showcase pieces, existing or planned, that served to promote the regime internationally or acted as an ideological ‘mask’ in the media. These included, in particular, buildings connected with cultural and historical identity (e.g. the Palace of Culture or the New Stage of the National Theatre), ones that provided evidence of the ‘world-class’ quality of the country’s architecture (often these were built for important international sports events, such as the Štvanice tennis stadium, the ski jump(s) in Harrachov, the rowing canal in Račice), and ones that demonstrated the country’s technological sophistication (e.g. Prague Metro, Žižkov TV tower). A specific group of structures was consisted of buildings that were often spectacular and prominent, but in their actual use were less well-known by the public and were sometimes almost a secret (e.g. recreational and medical facilities for leading figures of the regime or the international hotels). These buildings usually had strong political support, a more individual approach by designers, the exclusive supply of structural components and materials, and, last but not least, pressure to meet deadlines.

Compared to these ‘triumphs’ of ideological representation, however, everyday reality offered a joyless environment and grim hope for the future. With the onset of normalisation, public investment priorities were reduced mainly to panel housing estates and fulfilling the requirement to build as many apartments a year as possible. There was little energy left for quality public amenities. At the same time, however, for architects in the younger and middle generations, small- and medium-scale public buildings presented a way to brighten the bleak environment of the newly built housing estates and neglected city centres and for these architects to fulfil their own visions of better architecture. Luckily, prefabricated concrete frames developed for these purposes and the ‘percent for art’ was introduced at the end of the 1960s. Architects were able to modify standardised structural systems and cover the buildings with more creative façades (mainly by applying ceramics, glass, or coloured paints and cladding. Such efforts, combined with a touch of postmodernist or high-tech features and executed in collaboration with artists, allowed architects to fulfil their dream of creating humanised, socially responsible architecture. In addition, these buildings were supposed to blend with the local historical or landscape context, and, over the course of the 1980s, they came to address the broader challenges in society as well (e.g. the construction of comprehensive housing for the disabled and for seniors, and attempts to save energy with the use of insulation, solar panels, or shapes efficiently adapted to local weather conditions, etc.).

Keywords: public buildings, socialist architecture, 1980s, normalisation, late modernism, high-tech, postmodernism

Introduction

The architecture of the 1980s has for a long time been wrongfully overlooked. It is, however, a very interesting period, when there occurred a fundamental rethinking of the concept of modernism and its tools. The state-socialist regime in Eastern Europe had appropriated these tools and sought to defend the often exceedingly simplistic and technocratic application of them by citing the need for rational, central state management. All of this was in the service of a vision of a socially equitable society in which citizens’ everyday material needs would be fully provided for. The 1980s were a time when it had already become more than clear that this vision and the instruments of social engineering intended to achieve it had failed.

A five-year research project that was conducted under the NAKI II programme of the Ministry of Culture focused on examining the various aspects of the architecture of the 1980s in the Czech Republic and the perspectives from which to approach it. The project explored the transformations of various typological categories (in the book *(A)type*, 2019) and the never built visions of architects (the book *Unbuilt*, 2020) and the researchers conducted interviews with contemporaries (the book *Interviews*, 2020), mapped the typical strategies employed by architects in the 1980s (set out in an exhibition and in the book *Improvisation*, 2021), and, last but not least, looked at political and social movements (the book *Ambitions*, 2022). The research was based on the study of contemporary literature and sources in public and private archives, the use of oral history methods, and the study of individual buildings in situ. There is overlap between the individual sections of research and their published outcomes; they flesh each other out, and, ultimately, are designed to provide the most comprehensive account of a complicated and ambiguous time in our history and of the role of the architect in modern society.

The most interesting area of architectural production in the 1980s involved public buildings, which are compelling reflections of the problems of the late, unintelligible socialist (totalitarian) society and the failure of the technocratic line of the modernist idea but are also outstanding illustrations of the ambitions of the architects that sought an alternative path.

CONTRADICTIONS

The concept of a socialist state system was originally based on the idea of an egalitarian, caring society. In 1961 Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, still optimistically and confidently announced that by 1980 his country would possess the basic features of communism. Here he was certainly referring not just to the Soviet Union but to the whole of eastern, socialist Europe. But the reality of the 1980s was quite different. The Eastern bloc was contending with massive economic and social problems and countries had to adopt partial reforms, most notably transferring some responsibilities from the central planning bodies to smaller entities. However, decentralisation occurred in a society in which many actors,

after the experiences of recent years, had already found ways to bend and exploit the system to their own advantage. The result was not just a looser economic and power structure more amenable to change, but also an opaque environment that historian Petr Roubal has called an unequal ‘competition for scarce resources’ and that ultimately led to the collapse of socialism.¹

However distorted and inhumane the social system of normalisation was, the regime’s gradual disintegration and loss of absolute control also offered many architects unexpected alternative opportunities and strengthened their ambition to alter the shape of domestic architecture in the interest of higher values. Public buildings became the perfect image of these changes and of the conflicts between political goals, social needs, and the theoretical ideas of architects. The architecture of public buildings essentially split into three largely independent branches. The first branch consisted of politically high-profile projects that served to promote the image of the regime at home or internationally and, not rarely, to benefit prominent political figures. The second branch was the very opposite and was made up of purely utilitarian architecture that was primarily concerned with quantity and the mechanical satisfaction of citizens’ everyday needs. The third and, from an architectural perspective, most interesting branch was represented by public buildings of moderate size that were usually intended for large urban areas.

FOR SELECT SOCIETY ONLY

The state-socialist regime carefully cultivated its reputation and image abroad. Although it was a society shut off behind the ‘Iron Curtain’, this obstacle was only impenetrable on one side. Official and unofficial guests from abroad were welcomed because their presence improved the country’s image in international circles and, above all, because they brought with them valuable foreign currency, which was used to import scarce goods. Starting already in the 1960s, growing international trade was accompanied by the construction of spectacular international hotels and the Foreign Trade Enterprises building (which centrally managed bilateral trade and oversaw the opening over time of the famous Tuzex shops that offered selected Western goods to local citizens). Characteristic features of the international hotels included their luxurious interiors and a level of service comparable to exclusive facilities in the West, something that could not have been achieved without extensive cooperation with foreign suppliers, for example, in Yugoslavia. The hotels often occupied a prominent location and visual role within the structure of a city – for example, the towers of Hotel Forum (Jan Trávníček, 1982–1988) and Hotel Panorama (Alois Semela, Vlado Alujevič, 1977–1983) built on Pankrác Plain in Prague and offering impressive views of the historic city. Accommodation intended for foreign political delegates was of an even higher standard and included most notably Hotel Praha (Jaroslav Paroubek, Arnošt Navrátil, Jan Sedláček, Luděk Todl, Radko Černý, Jaroslav Švec, Josef Polák, Květoslav Příbyl, Věkoslav Pardyl, Zbyněk Hřivnáč, Milan



Fig. 1. Prague, Metro station vestibule, Palackého Square, arch. Zdeněk Drobný and Petr Kouřimský, 1979–1987 (photo. Josef Moucha).

Reichl, Jiří Turek, Karel Fořtl, 1971–1981), a large, terraced structure located in the middle of the Hanspaulka garden city in Prague. The hotel’s construction was followed in the architectural press, but the high-end interior furnishings were naturally kept secret from the general public. The refined interiors coupled a modernist airy spatial quality with hints of classical compositional principles, the most up-to-date technical equipment with high-grade artisanal materials, and the cool distinguished character of international hotel services with impressive works by leading domestic visual artists and designers.²

Works connected to ‘national’ culture and history were, by contrast, the object of major (and regime-mandated) attention from the media. The totalitarian authorities embraced selected events and figures of importance in the history of the Czech nation as a way of anchoring their power and portraying themselves in the popular political narrative as the natural outcome and culmination point of the nation’s historical struggle. Construction projects in Prague that attracted this kind of heightened attention included the restoration of the Royal Coronation Route near the Old Town Square and Celetná Street (Stanislav Hubička, SÚRPMO, PŮDIS, 1986–1988), the renovation and extension of the historic building of the National Theatre (Pavel Kupka, Ivo Loos, Markéta Lierová, Jana Hrdličková, Jan Matyáš, Karel Prager, Zbyšek Stýblo, 1962–1983), and the extensive reconstruction of St Agnes Monastery (Karel Kunca, Josef Hlavatý, Karel Fantýš, 1982–1984). The legitimacy of forging a link between the past and the present was reinforced by the fact that these historical buildings were not just being restored but were being extended with the addition of contextual new buildings (cf. the New Stage of the National Theatre and the roof of the Church of St Francis). It is important to add that the political support and attention showered on these projects secured them good conditions, the supply of high-quality materials, the involvement of excellent architects, and, last but not least, pressure to meet deadlines. There was undoubtedly also some frustration amongst the public and professionals that this kind of support was only directed at a small and select number of heritage sites. Local investment and political planners likewise adopted this strategy of focusing attention on just some of the most visible buildings and public spaces given the limited possibilities at the time. In the media, a few churches and pedestrian zones in the historic centres of cities showcased successful examples of the treatment of heritage sites, while just down the street ordinary historic buildings were falling into a state of disrepair because construction activities were focused entirely on quantifiable and architecturally banal housing developments and selected heritage sites.

It is certainly no surprise that the poor physical condition of the buildings in the valuable historic city centres, explained as the result of their irreparability, became the impetus for demolition (and for the relocation of residents to the newly built prefabricated buildings) and the subsequent construction of politically favoured buildings. Among such projects a special place was occupied by the buildings of the Communist Party headquarters, the role of which increased with the onset of normalisation in the 1970s, when the number of

¹ Roubal, P. (2022). Postmodern architecture in a premodern system. In *Ambice / architektura osmdesátých let: Ambitions / the architecture of the eighties* (pp. 58–68). České vysoké učení technické v Praze, Fakulta architektury.

² Karous, P. (Ed.). (2019). *Hotel Praha*. BiggBoss; Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová v Praze; Galerie výtvarného umění v Chebu.

staff in the political apparatus increased and there was no longer sufficient space in the ordinary administrative buildings. In addition, the Communist Party needed visible and very distinct and tangible symbols of its power. Headquarter buildings were thus usually built on demolition sites on the outskirts of urban centres, and their architectural designs were definitely not intended to be modest. This meant involving top local architects. In this already divided era, however, the architects paradoxically opted, often in reference to the given context, for contextual forms and designed party headquarters as ‘only slightly better’ and, in terms of their layout, essentially universal administrative buildings (thanks to which they are today usually well suited for use as municipal offices, universities, or libraries). The budgets for building these headquarter sites were surprisingly just slightly above average, which meant that high-quality materials and features were judiciously used only on the façades or in the entrance foyers. Among the many such buildings of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia we can mention the headquarters in Příbram (Jiří Merger, Jan Nováček, Stanislav Franc, 1980–1984), Hradec Králové (Jan Třeštík, 1989), Pardubice (Jan Třeštík, 1978–1983), Pelhřimov (Naděžda Dvořák, Antonín Dvořák, 1986), and Trutnov (Vladimír Vokatý, Petr Skála, 1980–1985).³

Sports facilities for international events and especially for the country’s most popular sports received special attention from the regime. They were designed to impress not just foreign guests and the media by showcasing the impressive success of the socialist economy, but also the domestic public, who in sports competitions found stimulation and a more cheerful, brighter counterweight to the everyday struggle for human dignity and the fulfilment of basic needs. The architects were thus presented with political support and were also given rigid deadlines (the start of a sporting event) that put pressure on contractors and, because of the specific nature of large sports buildings, sufficient room in which to engage in some artistic and structural experimentation. Among the many unique structures, we can name the multifunctional palace of culture and sport in Ostrava (Vladimír Dedeček, 1974–1986), Štvanice tennis stadium in Prague (Josef Kales, Jana Novotná, 1982–1986), the buildings and floating equipment of the man-made rowing canal in Račice (Tomáš Kulík, Jan Louda, Zbyšek Stýblo, LO–TECH, 1977–1986), the ski-jump centre in Harrachov (Jiří Špikla, Jaromír Syrovátko, Jiří Prskavec, Jan Suchánek, 1976–1982), and the Velká Chuchle horse racetrack in Prague (Antonín Buchta, Jan Jirka, 1985–1991).

Infrastructure projects were likewise ostentatiously used to make a display of the country’s successes and especially the regime’s advanced level of technological development. The media reported extensively on their construction. The names of prominent figures in the communist regime usually appeared in the title of such projects and opening ceremonies served as great opportunities to increase the visibility of functionaries. It is important to add that these were projects that were of exceptionally high architectural quality, were essential to the economy, were often initiated in the more economically successful preceding decades, and, above all, genuinely benefited the public. Examples

³ Pavel, M. (2019). Odkud vládla strana. In (A)typ / architektura osmdesátých let (pp. 88–94). České vysoké učení technické v Praze.

of exclusive projects in this area were the motorway built from Prague to Bratislava, the Prague Metro system, nuclear power plants, a gas pipeline (Transgas Dispatch Centre in Prague, Ivo Loos, Jindřich Malátek, Václav Aulický, Jiří Eisenreich, 1966–1978),⁴ and structures relating to telecommunications (the telephone exchange buildings designed by Spojprojekt), newspapers (Rudé právo publishing and printing house in Prague, Jaroslav Hošek, Miroslav Koukolík, 1982–1988), and television (Žižkov television tower in Prague, Václav Aulický, Jiří Kozák, Alex Bém, 1984–1992).⁵

In connection with regime-favoured projects, mention must also be made of the services provided to (politically) prominent figures and their family members and friends. It was this interest that prompted the construction, for example, of Homolka Hospital (Petr Kutnar, Jana Ježková, Svatopluk Zeman, 1982–1989), which was designed to have state-of-the-art technological equipment and experienced staff, and the conversion of an interwar villa in Prague-Košíře into a children’s clinic offering above-standard care (Martin Rajniš, Luboš Jíra, Mikoláš Vavřín, Lev Lauermann, 1983–1987), where there were works by artists that were supposed to help create a fun, non-clinical type of environment. Excellent conditions and a cheery, non-socialist atmosphere also awaited selected dignitaries and foreign guests in the historic spa towns, with their restored historical complexes (Fučík Spa Sanatorium in Teplice, Lubomír Košek, 1980–1982) and public spaces (Spa Promenade in Mariánské Lázně, Otakar Kuča, Peter Lehocký et al., 1981–1988; the Colonnade of the Culture House in Teplice, Karel Hubáček, Michael Brix, Martin Rajniš, 1977–1986).

EVERYDAY ARCHITECTURE

After the collectivisation of the professional architectural practice in 1948, typification and prefabrication became some of the fundamental goals of the state and the centrally controlled work of building design. The Research and Standardisation Institute and the Research Institute of Development and Architecture were to play a key role in this process. Initially, in the spirit of scientific functionalism, typification focused mainly on effective operational design, i.e. optimal building layouts, divided up into several different size categories according to the number of residents served. Over time, however, there arose the question of the appropriate up-to date design of façades and there were increasing efforts to maximise the use of prefabricated building components, which inevitably led to the rapid obsolescence of the proposed solutions. By the 1960s, the rigid process of centrally planning ‘ideal designs’ had already reached its limits. The architects of the Lesná housing estate in Brno (František Zounek, Viktor Rudiš, Miroslav Dufek, Ivan Veselý, Ladislav Volák, 1962–1970) consequently refused to use in their Scandinavian-style, modernistically conceived complex the prescribed design types for the schools, with their outdated Socialist-Realist concept, and employed their own design instead.

⁴ Goryczková, N. (Ed.). (2020). Transgas / areál řídicí ústředny Tranzitního plynovodu a budova FMPE v Praze: Historie, architektura, památkový potenciál. NPÚ, generální ředitelství.

⁵ Aulický, V., & Potůček, J. (Eds.). (2020). Žižkovská věž. Výzkumné centrum průmyslového dědictví Fakulty architektury ČVUT v Praze; Nakladatelství Jonathan Livingston.

The successful school design from Lesná was immediately proclaimed a new model, suitable for use in housing estates in the South Moravian region.

But even this strategy was unable to meet the rapidly changing demands and, above all, the need for a universal tool for the rapid construction of all civic amenities on housing estates. It had become apparent by the 1960s, when the mass production of prefabricated panels was finally introduced and the design of housing estates was quickly adapted to their use, that civic amenities were falling well behind the construction of residential units. This was the result of ambitious economic plans that prioritised the productivity aspect of production and the number of flats that were being completed in Czechoslovakia each year. There was no will on the part of either the panel manufacturers and construction companies or the client – investment officials – to interfere with the numbers the economic plans were calling for – not even in the higher interest of a quality environment. The prescribed number of flats had to be completed and there was no time or money left over for civic amenities. The economic plans were fulfilled, but discontent grew among the professional community and the public. A solution was seen to lie in the use of universal prefabricated reinforced concrete skeletons.

The plan was to mass produce frame ‘construction sets’ that had been tried and tested, were easy to use and easy to manufacture, were sufficiently universal, and could be applied in all kinds of public services buildings on housing estates. The Research and Standardisation Institute tested experimental frames in several projects and in cooperation with selected manufacturers – for example, the T–MS–61 (a standardised prefabricated frame, developed in 1961), followed by the improved T–MS–63 and T–MS–66. This progress culminated with the development of the highly successful T–MS–71 frame (more often known as the MS–71 or MS 71), which was created and tested in cooperation with Pozemní stavby České Budějovice. Another common system was the MS–OB frame from Ostrava. Finally, there was the Konstruktiva frame, developed in Prague, and first used in 1962–1963 in the residential halls at Kavčí Hory in Prague and then again in the giant Xaverov poultry factory buildings. These three most successful frames were based on a simple concept of a repetition of 1.2–metre modules (most of these spans were 6 or 7.2 metres in length, but impressive 9– or 12–metre spans were occasionally used). The module made it possible to combine these frames with the regular, mass–produced glass façade systems (especially Boletice panels) and prefabricated ceiling components. The main beams incorporated into the depth of the ceiling also allowed designers a freer hand in laying out the space of the interior.

The original plans that accompanied the introduction of the MS–71 and MS–OB envisioned that they would primarily be used for the urgent construction of schools and health facilities, and that in the 1980s they would then be replaced with a dramatically innovated version, along with more specialised and therefore more efficient prefabricated frames for specific building functions. The gap between ambitious state–socialist planning and the inertia of the country’s ossified economy, however, grew ever



Fig. 2. Prague, Seniors’ home in Bohnice, arch. Jan Líněk and Vlado Milunić, 1972–1981 (photo. Josef Moucha).



Fig. 3. Prague, Daycare centre Letná, arch. Vladimír Štůlc and Josef Vrana, 1980–1984 (private archive of Vladimír Štůlc and Josef Vrana).

wider. The introduction of newly developed systems into production continued to be very slow, however, and the original MS–71, MS–OB, and Konstruktiva systems ultimately remained the ones that were prevalently used in construction up to the change of regime in 1989.⁶ Ultimately, the buildings built to house civic amenities – especially schools, polyclinics, and shopping centres – were not of particularly high quality architecturally and, as in the case of the prefabricated apartment buildings, the main concerns were speed and quantity.

Nevertheless, architects studied manuals looking for loopholes in the rigid systems and gradually learned to overcome the limitations they had to work with. As a result, they managed to extract from frames a great range of spatial and artistic designs. It was with the aid of the ordinary MS–OB frame that it was possible to build the sober rectangular block that is the Odra Shopping Centre on the Nové Výškovice housing estate in Ostrava (Renáta Májková, 1978–1984), as well as the contextually conceived shopping centre with oblique–angled roof pieces on the main square in the small town of Tišnov (Olga Drápalová, Jaroslav Drápal, 1981–1982).

Another challenge was trying to conceal the poor quality of the support structures using a more artistically and uniquely designed façade. Ceramic tiles figured importantly in this. The production of ceramic tiles was modernised in the 1970s and their mass use was inspired by examples from Scandinavia. Architects liked to work with artists to design the ceramic tiling on the facades and this collaboration was supported by the ‘percent for art’ in project budgets. Architects used these funds to give the façade a distinct look, rather than to introduce works of art which had no relationship to the building or ideologically motivated ones. The way of using ceramic tiles was most commonly applied to the large window–less surfaces of shopping centre façades, which were meant to be suggestive of optimistic temples of consumerism and affluence. For example, in the case of Prior Department Store in Prague–Prosek (Anděla Drašarová, 1981–1983) the ceramic artist Antonín Stibůrek used just several basic tiles and combined them to produce a surprisingly playful work of art and architecture.

Many (and especially young) architects took advantage of the unified joints and simple modularity that prefabricated systems offered and mixed different ones to create a comprehensive, almost artistic bricolage. Jan Líněk and Vlado Milunić, employed this approach to achieve a more humanistic environment in the seniors’ homes they built in Bohnice, Háj, Malešice, and Chodov in Prague (1972–1981, 1976–1994, 1979–1987, 1983–1989).⁷ They used and blended different standard prefabricated elements and animated them with colours, and steel profiles. The architects worked consistently with a hierarchy of intimacy, the topography of the site, and the complex’s integration into the life of the housing estate. But they also played with the formal elements on the façade, which the architects themselves considered an extension and more up–to date version

⁶ Vorlík, P. (2021). Frames – systems as an invitation to improvise. In *Improvizace / architektura osmdesátých let: Improvisation / the architecture of the eighties* (pp. 92–100). ČVUT.

⁷ Poláčková, T. (2019). Ohnout panel pro spokojené stáří. In *(A)typ / architektura osmdesátých let* (pp. 149–157). České vysoké učení technické v Praze.

of technicist functionalism, though we can also observe clear signs of the influence of postmodernism and the need for an archetypal legibility (the tower, clocks, portal). A similar approach involving the extensive modification of ordinary prefabricated reinforced concrete panels had to be used by Pavel Stiborek and Miroslav Mikula when they designed apartments for the disabled in the South City housing estate in Prague (1983–1987).

This same strategy of combining generally widespread and inexpensive prefabricated frames with atypical building components and masonry structures (difficult because good quality craftsmen were hard to find) was also necessarily applied to building projects in the mountains, where it would have been impossible to use the ordinary frames and square-type structures found in the city, and where it was important to blend with the mountain environment, which could only be achieved with atypical shapes and (natural) materials. This strategy was especially used in the holiday resorts built by company trade unions as part of the benefits granted to select employees (ones who were scarce or whom companies wanted to hold on to for their valuable experience), which were intended to offer a higher standard of accommodation and services on almost an urban level (ROH Pochodeň, Krausovy Boudy resort in Špindlerův Mlýn, Karel Schmied, 1980–1985).⁸

Conversely, one surprising area in which full typification and prefabrication was successfully applied in the 1980s was smaller sports buildings. For example, the hugely widespread steel sports halls, many of which are still in use today, that were designed by architect Jiří Siegel working with the popular and de facto only lightweight steel prefabrication system KORD (manufactured by Rudné doly Jeseník), the wooden BIOS sports halls designed by Jan Nováček, and the steel halls housing swimming pool that were designed by Pavel Marek (manufactured in cooperation with Prague shipyards).

FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS AND AGAINST ALIENATION

Like the Communist Party headquarters and the department stores mentioned above, culture houses were likewise assigned to select locations, such as a demolition site or at least a very prominent lot near the city centre. Since the 1950s, culture houses had served as a key instrument in the regime's consolidation of power – with the proclaimed aim of creating a sophisticated environment – and from their prominent locations they were supposed to promote the correct ideological narrative through a carefully controlled form of culture. Culture houses also offered impressive settings in which to hold political meetings and Communist Party congresses (like the grandiose Prague Palace of Culture, Jaroslav Mayer, 1975–1981). The evolution of the architecture of culture houses, however, is not so black and white. In the early days, culture houses were mainly associated with the earlier Sokol movement and (Soviet) workers' clubs. In the 1950s some thought was given to creating uniform designs for culture houses in relation to the size of the city. Because culture by nature is rooted in time, and because

⁸ Kracík, M., & Savická, P. (2022). Social infrastructure, standard and non-standard civic amenities. In *Ambice / architektura osmdesátých let: Ambitions / the architecture of the eighties* (pp. 283–300). České vysoké učení technické v Praze, Fakulta architektury.



Fig. 4. Liberec, Swimming pool, arch. Pavel Švancer, 1968–1984 (photo Josef Moucha).



Fig. 5. Česká Lípa, Culture house, arch. Jiří Suchomel, 1974–1990 (photo Jiří Suchomel).



Fig. 6. Benešov, Swimming pool, arch. Tomáš Turek, 1985–1986 (private archive of Tomáš Turek).



Fig. 7. Jakartovice, Bus stop, arch. Jan Kovář, 1976 (photographer Jan Kovář).

the requirements for the auditoriums were variable, the culture houses were able to resist the use of such instruments, and from the 1960s on it was cultural houses that became an unexpectedly experimental building type with a wide range of spatial and artistic designs. Excellent local architects were involved in designing the buildings and they inevitably took both the local context and current developments in architecture into account. Given the unrelenting political support, they were also able to attain higher-standard furnishings and finishes. (Who would dare not to support culture in a socialist world that at least officially distanced itself from corrupt Western capitalist consumerism and flaunted its cultural sophistication and continuity with historical traditions?) It was thus the culture houses (despite their ideological overtones) that offered a refined form of architecture right in the historic centre of cities and acted as a deliberate counterweight to the undesirable traditional meeting places (the church and the pub). Examples of the many outstanding culture houses built include the impressive buildings in Uherský Brod (František Jelínek, Jiří Sniszczoł, 1978–1985), Teplice (Karel Hubáček, Otakar Binar, Václav Bůžek, Zdeněk Patrman, 1977–1986), Prague–Dáblice (Viktor Tuček, Vilém Hes, Jiří Kulišťák, 1979–1983), and Česká Lípa (Jiří Suchomel, 1974–1990).

Another area in which it became possible to pursue higher creative ambitions was the construction of municipal sports facilities, which were often combined with accommodation, restaurants, and facilities devoted to health and fitness. Attempts to develop uniform designs for sports buildings failed (e.g. the prototype for a reproducible municipal swimming pool in Nový Jičín, František Šaman, 1970–1975), and until the regime's collapse they offered architects a unique opportunity to experiment with the new large-span constructions and their effects on a structure's external appearance. Such experiments included, for example, the use of arches made of glued wooden lamellas (the ice rink at the Prague Exhibition Grounds, Karel Koutský, Jan Kozel, Vladimíra Leníčková, 1983–1985; and in Strakonice, Miloš Kopřiva, 1983), various types of steel trusses (sports hall in Chomutov, Martin Kubricht, 1981–1988), and the first attempts at an environmentally responsible design (swimming pool in Tachov with Trombe wall towards South, massive insulation on North and solar panels set on the roof, Eduard Schleger, Lukáš Liesler 1983–1992) or a poetically small-town or neoclassical style of architecture (swimming pool in Benešov, Tomáš Turek, 1985–1986; Riviera swimming pool in Brno, Petr Hruša, 1985–1990).

Smaller-scale public services outside the focus of political control, projects that were done with the considerable involvement of young architects, artists, and often local residents as well, were a superb way of escaping the unpleasantness of everyday reality. And that's what made it possible for two small gazebos, Chrámek přírody (Nature's Little Temple) (Tomáš Brix, 1985–1988) and Stodůlka (Little Barn) (Jiří Mojžíš, 1986), to appear in the middle of one of Prague's biggest housing estates, where their romantic appearance offered a sharp contrast with the 'soulless architecture of prefabricated houses';⁹ or for a post office, a scrap materials collection centre, and

⁹ Bukačová, J., & Vorlík, P. (2021, March 17). Interview with Jiří Mojžíš [Interview]. Nebušice.

the Na Brance restaurant (Tomáš Brix, 1979, 1982–1986; Tomáš Brix, 1978–1984; Václav Králíček, Tomáš Brix, 1976–1984) to be built with façades that apply a mix of inspirations from postmodernism, functionalism, high–tech, and the neo–styles of the 19th century to ordinary prefabricated building components.¹⁰

The surprising construction of spiritual funeral halls (in a supposedly secular society) occurred entirely outside the sphere of political oversight. Such structures were usually built in an existing cemetery and, moreover, in the midst of an impressive landscape (in Klenčí pod Čerchovem, Josef Batelka, 1971–1974; in Kunčice pod Ondřejníkem, Lubomír Hruška, 1987; in Kamenice nad Lipou, Miloslav Kadeřábek, Jaroslav Zbořil, Jaromír Jakeš, 1974–1980).¹¹ One remarkable area of work that made use of the traditional craftsmanship and materials ignored by big architecture and not supported politically involved the construction of small projects such as the sausage stand on Letná in Prague, which the author nicknamed the ‘Temple of the Banal’ (Jaroslav Kosek, 1987–1988), the bus stop in Jakartovice, built by a fresh graduate of the Faculty of Architecture and local carpenters (Jan Kovář, 1976), and the pavilion covering Antonín Spring in Mariánské Lázně (Michal Brix, 1986–1991), the architecture of which unexpectedly incorporates a wooden structure inspired by the spa’s romantic history and supported by columns made from stainless steel tubes, leftovers from the construction of a nuclear power plant.

CONCLUSION

It is nothing new in history to see the division of the architecture of public buildings into three groups – 1) prominent and to some extent exclusive in a higher state or political interest, 2) an everyday and not very ambitious standard, and 3) creatively conceived and sensitively situated public services buildings of a moderate size. We find the same stratification of public services in the late 19th century, in the interwar era, and indeed in the present day. It follows naturally from what is involved in managing and investing in a socially responsible modern state, from the availability and targeted use of financial and human resources, and, ultimately, from the expectations that society assigns to the public sphere.

At the same time, however, these investments in the past entail an obligation for the present and the future. In the case of prominent buildings of significance for society, their spectacular designs, more sophisticated materials and details, the great size, and, last but not least, the higher expectations attached to them as sites of crucial significance for society naturally means also that they require demanding and expensive care. In the case of everyday standard and ordinary buildings, by contrast we are overly accustomed to not ‘see’ the gradual degradation until major renovations or demolition

is required, during which usually little account is taken of the vestiges and values of the past, let alone of the nostalgic and essential memories of local residents.

The buildings that offer the greatest potential therefore are the ones of moderate size, which were already the targets of exceptional care and creativity from their designers, were not subject to excessive economising and consequently boast a surprisingly good quality design, and still offer a spatial standard that would be politically difficult to obtain in the economic and social circumstances of the present day. The stumbling block, however, is their management, which is usually the responsibility of the local councils, whose leaders often change after elections and with them also the council’s priorities. As a result, these buildings are often only partially restored and lack a long–term strategy for their use and conceptual care that would take into consideration their architectural and social qualities. A surprisingly large number of these buildings have thus succumbed to demolition or insensitive redevelopment (often intended to blot out their socialist origins or simply as a result of the lack of understanding of the architectural value) or have been lost because the local councils cannot find a suitable use for them. Unfortunately, this attitude of indifference is also observed among conservation authorities. Of the 47,000 buildings registered as immovable heritage in the Czech Republic, only 76 date from 1945–1989, and more than two–thirds of them are buildings and monuments from the 1950s. Public buildings of exceptional architectural quality that date from the period between the 1960s and the 1980s will have to wait to see their quality confirmed and for better care. Just as society is waiting for an appropriate and truly responsible use of this valuable heritage from the recent past.

¹⁰ Beran, L. (2019). Fragmenty městského prostoru: Střediska obchodu a služeb. In *(A)typ / architektura osmdesátých let* (pp. 116–120). České vysoké učení technické v Praze; Směták, P. (2019). Drobné služby na sídlišti. In *(A)typ / architektura osmdesátých let* (pp. 198–204). České vysoké učení technické v Praze.

¹¹ Vicherková, V. (2019). Na rozloučenou. In *(A)typ / architektura osmdesátých let* (pp. 168–173). České vysoké učení technické v Praze.

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