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**Transactional Activism in Bratislava:  
A Case Study of Nová Cvernovka  
Cultural and Creative Centre**



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# CONTENT

<b>Introduction</b> .....	8
The circumstances, methodology, and ethics of my field research .....	11
Chapter 1:	
<b>Civic activism</b> .....	16
Definition and content of the term for my research .....	16
The development of civic activism in Slovakia .....	19
Chapter 2:	
<b>Social movements and the theoretical concept of transactional activism</b> .....	23
Urban social movements .....	25
The view of theoretical literature on civic activism and urban social movements in Central and Eastern Europe .....	27
Definition of the theoretical concept of transactional activism .....	31
Operationalisation of transactional activism in the context of my research .....	33
Chapter 3:	
<b>Cultural and creative centres in Slovakia</b> .....	37
Creative cities and creative industry concepts and their critical reflection .....	40
Chapter 4:	
<b>The story and the present of Nová Cvernovka</b> .....	44
Cvernovka as a yarn- and thread-making factory .....	44
Cvernovka as an artistic and creative community: 'Old Cvernovka' .....	45
Moving to the current premises: The origins of Nová Cvernovka .....	50
The development and present of Nová Cvernovka .....	50
Chapter 5:	
<b>Types of civic activism in the story of Cvernovka</b> .....	53
Public mobilisation by Cvernovka .....	53
Cooperation with other entities in the raising of awareness about the functioning of cultural and creative centres: ' <i>Trust-building</i> ' .....	58

## CONTENT

Reflecting on the current social and political events .....	62
Educating the public and awareness-raising .....	66
Raising of and reflecting on new topics and concepts .....	70
Overall picture of civic activism in Nová Cvernovka .....	74
Chapter 6:	
<b>Analysis of transactional activism of the Cvernovka Foundation .....</b>	<b>77</b>
Analysed manifestations of transactional activism of the Cvernovka Foundation .....	78
Partners, strategies, and the action repertoire of the Cvernovka Foundation's transactional activism .....	80
The strategic capacity of the Cvernovka Foundation .....	83
Analysis of the Cvernovka Foundation's resources .....	89
The impacts of strategic capacity and access to resources on transactional activism in the Cvernovka Foundation .....	95
Suggestions for the research on the theoretical concept of transactional activism .....	102
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Photographies .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>118</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Imagine a city as a network. At the level of physical space, one recalls a cobweb of streets lined by buildings and interrupted by green islets or water bodies. However, what remains, at first sight, hidden to our eyes on this imaginary map are networks of people. Trajectories of inhabitants and visitors of the city, interconnected through family and personal relationships, employment, hobbies, favourite places, etc. The book *Transactional Activism in Bratislava: A Case Study of Nová Cvernovka Cultural and Creative Centre* deals with networks and collaborations in the realm of civil society through an example of the activities of the cultural and creative centre Nová Cvernovka in Bratislava. As we can see, the activities of this centre are abundant not only in the field of art and culture, but also civic activism. Cvernovka represents an “ecosystem” of the creative human potential and is characterised by cooperation between individuals, art studios, and civic associations. The central focus of my analysis is the Cvernovka Foundation as the manager of this cultural and creative centre and, at the same time, an established initiative within Slovakia’s civil society. The principal objective of this monograph is to find out, using the theoretical concept of transactional activism, why the manifestations of cooperation in the sphere of civic participation inherent to activities of this organisation. For a detailed analysis of transactional activism, it is first necessary to draw attention to the general activities of Nová Cvernovka in the field of civic activism. In the book, I thus offer a classification of these activities into five basic categories which are subsequently analysed by means of theoretical literature on civic activism and urban social movements in Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Jacobsson, 2015b; Jacobsson – Korolczuk, 2019; Bitušíková, 2015a, 2015b; Císař, 2013b).

The publication deals with other topics as well, in particular the sphere of cultural and creative centres as places that bring together artists, start-up entrepreneurs, cultural workers, and civil activists. This happens mainly with the purpose of artistic and cultural creation, work activities, the organisation of public programmes, and engagement in civic activism. The creators and operators of these centres in Slovakia are usually active individuals or civic initiatives, and they can be considered part of the ‘independent culture’. To operate successfully and on a long-term basis under the Slovak conditions, they must cooperate with municipal or regional authorities. Such centres are often created in abandoned buildings owned by these institutions. They thus bring new functions to the given part of the city as well as young visitors owing to their increasing popularity mainly among the youngest generations. Cultural and creative centres can thus be considered a new urban phenomenon that penetrates Slovak cities as well,

influencing both their current and future shape. It is therefore necessary to pay appropriate scientific and expert attention to these places, which has so far been absent in Slovakia. What I consider the major benefit of this book is the fact that it is based on long-term qualitative research of a particular cultural and creative centre. During my research, I captured many manifestations of civic activism in real time as well as the overall development of Nová Cvernovka from the launch of its operation in the new premises in 2017 until summer 2019. In autumn 2020, while writing the book, I added further information to the findings from my field research. I believe my findings will contribute not only to the research of civic (and, in the narrower sense, transactional) activism and urban social movements in Slovakia, but also to the theoretical and empirical grasping of cultural and creative centres in our country.

The outcomes of my research are presented in various contexts. In the spatial sense, the urban environment and, more specifically, Bratislava, form an important background for the book. Thematic emphasis is placed on urban social movements, civic activism, transactional activism, creative industry, as well as cultural and creative centres. I also observe the functioning and organisational model of a specific organisation. Another important element is the time context, namely Slovakia's socialist past, which is influencing the current form of the urban environment and civil society even after three decades following its dissolution. You are thus holding in your hands a scientific publication whose ambition is to contribute mainly to the scientific disciplines of urban and organisational anthropology and by spreading knowledge about cultural and creative centres and civic activism in the Central and Eastern European region it can be inspiring for other scientific disciplines as well.<sup>1</sup> I am confident that this book will speak not only to the expert public, but also to all those interested in issues related to cultural and creative centres or in Nová Cvernovka itself.<sup>2</sup> The publication includes an extensive chapter mapping the overall story of this cultural and creative centre in Bratislava. It should be added that this story is extremely diverse, organic and, so far, little reflected in publications of expert or popularisation nature.

The name "Nová Cvernovka" derives from the original locality of the cultural and creative centre, within the former textile factory complex, colloquially called "Cvernovka" (cverna means thread). It was located between Páričkova, Svätoplukova and Košická streets in the Ružinov city district of Bratislava. The beginnings of its new existence date back to 2006, when artists and creative people began to move there. They gradually formed a relatively closed community which

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<sup>1</sup> In particular for sociology, culturology, human geography, economy, and urbanism.

<sup>2</sup> The readers who are interested in the history of Nová Cvernovka are recommended to read the expert and popularisation book *Cvernovka* (Csino – Mistrík, 2014), which maps the functioning of the „old Cvernovka“ and also offers a rich photo documentation of it. This publication was an important source of information when writing this book.

worked without managing a formal organisation for a long time. This changed in 2015, when the Cvernovka Foundation (*Nadácia Cvernovka*) was established with the principal aim of facilitating and improving the effectiveness of negotiations with the developer that became the owner of the complex and planned to reconstruct it into a residential and office zone. This was the reason why, in 2016, the tenants moved to the premises of the former Secondary Chemical Vocational School at Račianska Street, which they have long been renting from the Bratislava Self-Governing Region. This is why the attribute ‘new’ (*nová*) was added to the name of the centre. Ever since, we can observe the development of Nová Cvernovka in many ways – its functioning has become professional, the number of tenants increased, the thematic scope of the Cvernovka Foundation has broadened, and the popularity of this place has increased. As this brief overview suggests, the development of nowadays Nová Cvernovka has been influenced by various factors and the knowing of its story is important also when reading this book. I shall therefore return to it later in a separate chapter. And since my conclusions on the development of Cvernovka and its activist activities are based on my long-term field research, the introductory part of this book also contains a description of its objectives, methodology, and ethics.

I subsequently continue with the main object of my interest – civic activism. In Chapter 1, I deal with the definition and operationalisation of this term. I also focus on the types of participation which are relevant to my topic – urban and cultural activism. In a separate sub-chapter, I shall look at the overall development of civil society within the territory of nowadays Slovakia, since to understand its current functioning, it is important to know the extremely diverse development of this issue in our country. I shall begin my short overview with the period of the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938), dealing briefly with the socialism period and, when characterising the major changes after 1989, I shall also describe the current new forms of civic participation in Slovakia.

In theoretical Chapter 2, I shall deal with the origins and characteristics of social movements with an emphasis on urban social movements. In a separate sub-chapter, I shall describe the state of urban social movements in the post-socialist context of Central and Eastern Europe. I rely primarily on the publications by Kerstin Jacobsson and Ondřej Císař, which will be important in the analysis of the identified types of civic activism in Nová Cvernovka as well. As we shall learn, the frequent presence of transactional activism is an important element of civil society in our region. It is this theoretical concept that is the central analytical tool of this book. Therefore, in Chapter 2 I offer a definition and operationalisation of transactional activism.

The key topic of Chapter 3 are cultural and creative centres. As far as the terminology in this area is not uniform, I shall explain in this chapter why I have chosen the given equivalents and what I understand by them at the empirical level in the Slovak environment. The support of cultural and creative centres in

public policies in Slovakia is often related to the development concept of creative cities, based on the ideas of creativity and the so-called creative industry. Hence, this chapter also brings a description of these concepts and their critical reflection.

Chapter 4 introduces the overall story of the researched location – from its grassroots origins in the original premises of the yarn- and thread-producing factory until today’s Nová Cvernovka. We shall see that the current thematic diversity of the functioning of Nová Cvernovka is largely due also to its development that has had to respond to several unexpected events.

In Chapter 5 of the monograph, I shall present the conclusions brought by my field research in Nová Cvernovka. In order to understand the centre’s rich activities in the field of activism, I shall define and describe five basic types of civic activism, as reflected in the story of Cvernovka. Even though the boundaries between these categories are not fixed, they enable an analytical grasping of the manifestations identified and their linking to the conclusions of theoretical literature on civic activism and urban social movements in Central and Eastern Europe.

Many manifestations of civic activism in Nová Cvernovka are based on various types of cooperation. Chapter 6 thus contains an analysis of these manifestations through the lens of the theoretical concept of transactional activism. Thanks to the description of the partners and the action repertoire of cooperation projects, we shall obtain a realistic view of transactional activism of the Cvernovka Foundation. This part is followed by an analysis of the resources and strategic capacity of this organisation, which will finally bring us to responses to the essential question of this book: why are the manifestations of transactional activism typical of the Cvernovka Foundation’s activities?

### **The circumstances, methodology, and ethics of my field research**

The knowledge of the story of Nová Cvernovka and the analysis of its activities would not have been possible without conducting long-term qualitative field research. It became a tool for obtaining the information and conclusions presented in this book, and I therefore consider it important to dedicate space in its introductory part to its objectives, methods, research sample, and ethics. The field research was carried out from summer 2017 until September 2019. After launching my work on the book in September 2020, I also dealt with updating the findings and verifying specific information. I used mainly e-mail communication with some respondents. Unfortunately, a full return to the spot, associated with personal contacts, was not possible due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the accompanying measures in Slovakia. The book is thus based primarily on my field research from the period 2017–2019 and is complemented with some information acquired during autumn and winter 2020. The main research objective was to identify, observe, describe, and categorise the different types and manifestations of civic activism in the story

of Nová Cvernovka from its early stages until the present, with an emphasis on an analysis of transactional activism. The research continued with an analysis of the collected material based on theoretical literature describing the state of civic activism and urban social movements in Central and Eastern Europe (mainly Jacobsson, 2015b; Jacobsson – Korolczuk, 2019; Bitušíková, 2015a, 2015b; Císař, 2013b) and the theoretical concept of transactional activism (Petrova – Tarrow, 2007; Císař – Navrátil, 2010; Diviák – Mazák, 2017).

I consider the fact that the research mapped the development and functioning of a specific cultural and creative centre from a long-term perspective and in real time to be a significant contribution to the analysis. An important role was played by the qualitative methods of social anthropological research, enabling the researcher to dive deep in the chosen topic. The first method of my research were **semi-structured interviews**. The respondents were persons working in Nová Cvernovka – members of the Cvernovka Foundation as well as other tenants of the centre's premises. The thematic focus of the interviews differed according to the respondent category. The members of the Foundation were asked mainly about the history of Cvernovka, the goals, the concept, and the way of functioning of the centre, as well as specific manifestations of civic activism. As for tenants, I sought to find out the motivation and circumstances of their choice to come to Cvernovka; their aims, opinions, and experience in the field of civic activism, as well as their opinions on the functioning and heading of Nová Cvernovka. In the case of both respondent groups, the questions focusing on transactional activism were important for me. They mainly concerned the different circumstances of established cooperation and joint initiatives – e.g. the reasons and details for launching (or terminating) them, their strategies and action repertoire, as well as the declared advantages and disadvantages for the actors.

Nineteen respondents took part in the semi-structured interviews; ten females and nine males aged 24–43 years. The average age was 36 years, which more-or-less copies the age structure of the people working in Nová Cvernovka. My respondents were people of the younger generation who live predominantly in Bratislava and work in the field of culture, art, and the non-profit sector, or are interested in these spheres. Four 'key respondents' stood out mainly thanks to their knowledge, experience, and insight into the research topic. Their position within Nová Cvernovka was also important, legitimising the course of my research, as I could refer to them when contacting other people. The organic character of the topic, which required continuous exploration and updating of information, resulted in the fact that repeated interviews with (also) these key respondents were often more valuable for me than the search for new respondents with the aim to record new interviews.

**The study of media releases, official documents, and information available on the internet** was an important part of my research and completed the picture of the overall story and functioning of Cvernovka and the centre's activities in the field

of civic activism. The media releases and news reports were relevant not only as a reflection of the present, but also for the exploration of the origins and functioning of Nová Cvernovka in the period before the launch of my field research, i.e. in the years 2006–2017. In addition to newspaper articles, news reports and interviews, it is important to mention certain contracts, official documents, annual reports of the Cvernovka Foundation, or the project of use of the former school dormitory, which are also available online. Social networks on the internet, informing about the news and events held in Nová Cvernovka and often bringing photo documentation as well, have also been of great help during my research.

When initially thinking about my research, I considered semi-structured interviews the most important research method; however, the research itself showed that the study of media releases and official documents was at least of the same relevance and information value. During the interviews, it was important to take into account the potential subjectivity of the respondent's perspective which could have result (though not necessarily) from his or her position within Nová Cvernovka or from other factors and motivations. Any contradictory information were also relevant for my research; however, it was necessary to critically evaluate this information and to verify and understand it in the wider context. The official documents and media releases offered the possibility to confirm and reflect on some factual information and were extremely useful also in the exploration of past events and the overall story of Cvernovka, as it was impossible to rely only on the respondents' memory with respect to these topics.

Another research method was **participant observation** that took place within the premises or in the surrounding area of Nová Cvernovka. The operation of the centre as such and the public events held there and related to civic activism were observed, in particular gatherings, discussions, workshops, and exhibitions that addressed current social issues and themes such as environmental and green activism, cultural activism, public space, education, homelessness and social housing, etc. During these events, I also made records of the target group, the age and gender structure of the visitors, and attendance. The most important aspect of these observations was their thematic concept itself and the related topics.

The research material was evaluated by means of **content analysis**. This analysis was based, in addition to the transcriptions of interviews and records from participant observations, on all obtained relevant textual documents (media releases, news reports, laws, decrees, annual reports, amendments to contracts, and other documents). In order to simplify the analysis for practical reasons, I used the ATLAS.ti programme, encoding excerpts from textual files with their subsequent arrangement into categories and themes according to their codes. The basic unit of the analysis was the code – a short name that most accurately describes what the given concise meaning unit means. For example, for different types of civic activism, the code referred to the name of a particular event or initiative. Since the excerpts concerned several aspects of the given examples of civic activism, the

code was usually followed by a brief note specifying the nature of the information (e.g. *Exhibition Occupation 1968\_education*). This process facilitated my orientation among the large amounts of collected data. The next step was to assign the codes to categories – groups of codes that are interrelated through their contents. Thanks to this procedure, I was able to define the different manifestations of civic activism of Nová Cvernovka through five basic types and link them to theoretical literature.

The analysis of the Cvernovka Foundation's transactional activism was based on a similar procedure, constituting the last and most important stage of the data interpretation. The theoretical concept of transactional activism was used as its basis, drawing from it also at the level of codes and categories.<sup>3</sup> This analysis required major depth, and therefore contained, apart from codes and categories, a third level – classification by themes. With respect to content analysis, a theme can be considered an expression of the basic meaning and latent content, found in two or more categories. Themes express data at the interpretative level and provide answers to “why?”, “how?” or “in what way?” type of questions (Erlingsson – Brysiewicz, 2017: 94). Thanks to this, it was not only possible to describe the different aspects of transactional activism, but also to analyse them in the context of this theoretical concept and respond to the question of why these types of cooperation are frequent in the Cvernovka Foundation's activities.

In scientific research, it is extremely important to follow all ethical principles, as the researcher's steps in the field and during the presentation of the researcher's results can have a direct impact on the life and mutual relations of concrete people. My research concerned an organisation with an established structure, way of functioning, and mutual relations between various actors. At the launch of my research, I entered this micro-world as a foreign person, which I do not see as a negative. It was from the perspective of a disinterested person that I was able to gradually learn about the functioning of Nová Cvernovka and understand its activities, objectives, and values. Nevertheless, my position changed in this process: from originally a foreigner, I became a person whom others were greeting in the corridors of Cvernovka and began to call each other by our first names. I was meeting the people from Cvernovka not only during my research but also in my ‘spare time’, while sitting in the bar and having a glass of beer after a difficult research day, or at concerts where I was present not as a researcher but as a music fan and supporter of the given band. The quotation marks here are not accidental, as these two positions cannot be separated completely. An individual can get passionate about some expressions of art also during research

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<sup>3</sup> Examples of codes used in the analysis of transactional activism: ‘*networks*’, ‘*cultural resources*’ and ‘*people's mobilisation*’. These were assigned to categories such as ‘*strengthening of strategic capacity*’, ‘*weakening of strategic capacity*’ or ‘*factors leading to transactional activism*’. They refer to terms which form the basis of the theoretical concept of transactional activism. For the definitions of these terms see pages 31–36 and 83.

and observe the surroundings at a concert or exhibition. This ‘transformation’ from a foreigner was a long-term process. The increasingly informal character of our communication was an advantage, considered as an expression of trust. At the same time, I sought not to lose the attributes ‘researcher’, ‘scientists’ or ‘Tomáš from Slovak Academy of Sciences’ in people’s perception while moving around Nová Cvernovka to make sure that they were aware of my professional intentions. This happened by constantly explaining the objectives of my research during the interviews and by mentioning the reason for my presence. The research limits were thus defined, with an emphasis on adhering to its ethics. In this regard, I complied with the common basic principles of ethnological research and followed the Code of Ethics of the Ethnographic Society of Slovakia. In addition, I also observed the internal rules of my workplace – the Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and respected the general rules and practices of Nová Cvernovka.

Anonymisation was another important ethical issue of my field research. The anonymisation of the cultural and creative centre as such was out of the question, as Nová Cvernovka would have been easily traceable based on the described facts and because its ups and downs as well as solutions to problems were commonly covered by the mass media. In addition, the overall story of Cvernovka, its relocation to the current premises, its current place and other factors represent an important context of the research topics which cannot be ignored or ‘concealed’. The anonymisation of the Cvernovka Foundation as the manager of the cultural and creative centre would be problematic for a similar reason. This principle also applies to certain initiatives and studios within Nová Cvernovka, mentioned in this work. The respondents themselves are anonymised and their statements are published<sup>4</sup> with a reference to their gender and year of birth (e.g.: M\_1988). Even though some organisation structures and initiatives of Nová Cvernovka are named and described in the book, when quoting respondents’ statements, I make sure that they cannot be linked to these entities. I am aware, though, that some relevant quotations from the respondent’s statements can suggest, to a certain degree, their position within the community. However, I do not quote directly potential ethically problematic statements expressing, for example, critical opinions. If such opinions were relevant from the point of view of the research topics, I present them in the form narrated by my own words, without referring to the respondent.

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<sup>4</sup> To preserve authenticity, I have not reformulated the quotations published in the book into literary language. I have only made minor adjustments (e.g. correction of wrong declension or removal of verbal ‘crutches’ and pauses) for the sake of smooth reading. These adjustments have not changed the content meaning of the statements. The quotations in the text serve as an illustration of the presented statements and conclusions (which are, however, based not only on the interviews with the respondents, but also on other methods used) and as a way of enlivening the text with authentic views of the actors.

# Chapter 1:

## CIVIC ACTIVISM

### Definition and content of the term for my research

Civil society is a particularly important component of any well-functioning democratic governance. It is a domain in which individuals can influence politics, public life, and the environment by means of civic activism. I define civic activism as a series of actions aimed to bring about a certain social, cultural, political, economic, or environmental change. These actions can be performed by individuals, groups, or movements (Bitušíková, 2015a: 330). The organised form of civic activism takes place mainly through non-governmental organisations, which, in Slovakia, most often take the legal form of civic associations, non-profit organisations, or foundations, involving a wide range of activities. They focus on human rights protection or care for the elderly, disabled and socially disadvantaged people; educational or cultural associations; religious organisations; sports and recreation clubs. Civil society also involves actions by individuals, carried out without being engaged in a formal organisation, which thus sometimes escape the attention of scientists and experts. It can be, for example, the expression of support for an initiative, the raising of awareness about a current topic, or the joining of a crowdfunding<sup>5</sup> campaign. As we shall see in the next chapters, we can observe many similar examples also in the activities of Nová Cvernovka.

In scientific literature, the topic of civil society is also accompanied with the term participation. In the context of civic activism, it represents the influencing, sharing, or redistribution of power, control, resources, and knowledge. It is a voluntary activity by means of which people seek to influence or control the decisions that affect them. Besides raising one's voice and making a choice, the essence of participation lies also in the development of the human organisational and managing capacity in problem solving (Saxena, 2011: 31–32). In general terms, this process brings financial, social, or psychological costs as well as benefits for individuals. People usually participate in a particular activity when they perceive that the benefits outweigh the costs.

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<sup>5</sup> Crowdfunding is a term used frequently in the book. It is a public campaign aimed at collecting money, usually taking place on the internet. These online platforms offer fundraisers the opportunity to engage the public and, possibly, offer financing entities certain special rewards for their contributions (Belleflamme – Omrani – Peitz, 2015: 11).

Mainly in post-socialist countries, it is important to study civic activism in the wider sense, not only with an emphasis on its organised forms. In this region, particularly important are small daily acts by individuals as the initial steps to bring about change, though they do not necessarily lead to an activity visible to the public or to a widespread collective activity. This attachment to individualism is also promoted by political disillusion and a deeply-rooted tendency to anti-collectivism as one of the references of people's socialist experience (Jacobsson – Korolczuk, 2019). The influence of the experience gained abroad and the related efforts to improve the life situation in their own country are important especially in the case of active citizens of the younger generation, who make up the predominant part of the occupants of Nová Cvernovka. This often happens at the individual and non-organised level also because of the complicated legislation and bureaucracy in Slovakia.

In the text, civic activism will refer not only to collective, organised, and formal activities, but also to minor initiatives and manifestations of participation, often related to the daily lives of people who are not necessarily considered civic activists. In the context of my research in Nová Cvernovka, this refers, for instance, to educating the public or the raising of new issues and concepts which are not yet very widespread in Slovakia. We may also mention the efforts to simplify legislative processes, improve the condition of the public space, giving opinions on social and political issues, etc. From the thematic perspective, the manifestations studied in this book concern mainly issues related to the urban environment, ecology, environmental sustainability, public policies, the school system, education, assistance to socially vulnerable people, culture, and art. This thematic diversity is present also because Nová Cvernovka brings together under its roof a number of active people who deal with different types of activities. It should be noted that what is relevant to my research are those manifestations of civic activism that take place (or took place in the past) within Cvernovka's premises or relate directly to it. By this, I specifically mean the activities of the Cvernovka Foundation in the field of transactional activism, which, in the form of different types of cooperation, reaches beyond the physical spaces of this centre.

In connection with civic activism, one should not forget the influence of the urban environment. Cities generate it to a larger extent compared to rural areas, because it is in cities that factors supporting the emergence of civic activism concentrate. Cities are characterised by more resources, a denser population, a higher level of education, more wealth, as well as higher income inequalities and a major concentration of social and economic problems in the urban environment. In addition, the urban environment houses political and social institutions which are often the target and promoter of civic activism (Schoene, 2017: 4–5). According to Pasi Mäenpää and Maija Faehnle (2017), urban activism has long been associated with the description of typically reactive urban movements and

actions aimed at exerting political influence, such as demonstrations. The current way of thinking about urban activism extends this area with proactive activities as well. However, urban activism is not only the manifestation of civic activism within the urban environment. It primarily involves activities aimed to improve the quality of the urban environment, urban society, and life at urban locations through collective actions focusing on the city and its decision-making processes (Bitušíková, 2015a: 330). Urban activism stems from specific challenges, such as population density, population diversity, and imbalance between stakeholders. These stimulate the development of a specific urban civil sphere which includes organisations and initiatives oriented on the public space, democracy, social engagement, and quality of life. Their basic question is: “In what kind of city would we like to live?”, personalising an opposition against the general trends of privatisation of public spaces and housing, social and spatial segregation, and the lack of access to decision-making by citizens (Domaradzka, 2018: 609).

The internet and virtual social networks are also a significant factor in the development of present-day urban activism. Their consequence is not only ‘internet activism’,<sup>6</sup> but also new forms of mobilisation and activism based on internet social networks which may lead to changes in urban planning and development. Communication technologies enable citizens to act as individuals and organise in communities without authorities as mediators. Hence, the key topic of urban activism is not only citizens’ participation in decision-making processes, but their direct acting to improve the urban environment, services, and cultural life (Mäenpää – Faehnle, 2017). As we shall later see in detail, in the civic activism of Nová Cvernovka, the internet and social networks are important factors mainly in crowdfunding campaigns and in the engagement in public challenges and web-based petition initiatives. At the same time, the internet is a significant tool to increase people’s awareness about Nová Cvernovka by informing about the public programme and the centre’s activities.

As far as the book presents the outcomes of the research on the cultural and creative centre Nová Cvernovka, the terms used frequently will also be culture and art, with an overlap with the civic activism sphere. It is therefore appropriate to drop a few words about cultural activism. Cultural activism involves initiatives and activities in which art, culture, activism, and politics meet, overlap, and influence each other (Verson, 2007: 172). An important instrument of cultural activism is artistic and creative methods which can disrupt the usual assumptions and expectations by creating new meanings and alternative ideas about, for instance, the urban space (Duncombe, 2007). In practice, cultural activism in Slovakia is most commonly expressed in the form of various events, both cultural

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<sup>6</sup> Frank Edwards, Philip N. Howard, and Mary Joyce (2013) define internet activism as organised public efforts to meet collective demands in which civil activists and their supporters use digital mass media.

and creative, as well as independent cultural centres, galleries, and theatres which are organised and run by civic associations or concrete individuals. It also involves the activities of those artists who present their opinions, through their works and creativity, on the different aspects of the current social and political situation or participate in protests. In Slovakia, these activities usually pertain to the area of independent culture, representing an alternative to the official culture established and financed by the state, and accentuates in its activities the values of independence, authenticity, and engagement. It is therefore characterised by an overlap with the civic activism sphere.

The research of the past years suggests that cultural activism plays an increasingly important role in the development and functioning of cities. Johannes Novy and Claire Colomb (2013: 1820) call this stage of mobilisation and politicisation a cultural (or creative) turn in urban development and politics. They explain it with a raising number of people who oppose the expressions of growth- and profit-oriented business agenda in cities as well as the attribution or complete destruction of culture and creativity that these agendas may bring.

## **The development of civic activism in Slovakia**

The impacts of the current globalisation trends on civic activism in Slovakia is extremely important, and I shall deal with them also in connection with my analysis of the activities of Nová Cvernovka. However, in the research of the civil society in Slovakia, we should not ignore the context of the past, as the present state of the civil society in our country is the result of the historical and social development, as described in this chapter.

I shall begin my overview with the period of the first Czechoslovak Republic. The years 1918–1938 can be characterised as the age of get-togetherness and teaming, with a significant increase in the number of voluntary organisations and societies as well as social and health associations and foundations in Slovak cities and towns. The different forms of associations' public activities became a firm part of life during the inter-war period. They were an important democratisation tool and an indicator of modernisation and the process of creation of civil society (Mannová, 1991). Given the strong dependence of these initiatives on the political, ethnic, and religious affiliation of their members, many associations contributed to growing intolerance in society more than to democracy building (Mannová, 1987).

The wartime Slovak state period (1939–1945) disrupted the continuity of civil society development and many associations were dissolved by the authoritative government. After 1945, civil society began to be active again and many initiatives restored their activities. The subsequent communist regime caused that the associations had to transform into so-called voluntary organisations, integrated

into existing organisations, or they ceased to exist. Cancelled was not only the use of the terms association and consorting, but also their essence – voluntary membership (Dudeková, 1998 cit. in Brozmanová Gregorová et al., 2009: 37). The regime was liberalised in 1964–1968, which, however, was not accompanied in Slovakia with the development of associations to such a degree as in Czechia. After the suppression of the attempt to reform the communist regime by the invasion of the Warsaw troops (1968), resistance movements began to emerge (e.g. Charta 77), though in Slovakia to a lesser extent than in Czechia. Two groups, in particular, had a more open confrontation with the state authority in Slovakia – Catholic activists, and nature conservationists supported by a part of the artists' and social scientists' community. These initiatives intensified their activities in the second half of the 1980s and were important also during the outbreak of the November events in 1989. Several personalities from this sphere became the political leaders of the 1989 revolution and subsequent changes (Bútorá et al., 2012: 17). Before these events, the actors of these movements were often persecuted by the State Intelligence Service since the communist regime systematically destroyed organically developed associations that did not succumb to its ideology. As far as the public sphere was under the control of the Communist Party, the citizens adapted to the regime by strengthening their ties with their families and friends. They often opted for 'life with a mask' and made a radical distinction between the public and the private spheres (Strečanský, 2017).

An important milestone in the development of civic activism in Slovakia was the year 1989 and the Velvet Revolution events. Their direct initiators were students, who were later joined by actors, theatre performers as well as other population groups. While, initially, the students' demands concerned mainly the functioning of the university education system in the country, their requirements soon became nationwide and penetrated the political sphere as well. The activities of university students in Slovakia included the organisation of protest rallies and petitions, the establishment of a student strike committee as well as an occupation strike of universities, leading to the replacement of the management of many educational institutions. In addition, students contributed to the dissemination of information and of the ideas of social changes throughout Slovak regions and supported the activities of the emerging political movement called Public Against Violence.

The social pressure expressed, among other things, by a general strike and mass demonstrations eventually brought about the fall of the socialist regime and subsequent increase in association and civic activism in Slovakia. Not only political parties were founded, but also new organisations were established by artists, journalists, businessmen, and activists. Dozens of various local and nationwide ad-hoc initiatives were born and self-help, mutually beneficial groups and associations emerged (Bútorá et al., 2012: 17–18). This positive trend was partly threatened and interrupted during the government of Vladimír Mečiar

(1993–1998) when the initially sporadic attacks against some representatives of civic organisations developed into a systematic campaign and attempts of the government authority to limit space for civic activism. As a result, the non-governmental sector mobilised, strengthened, and began to cooperate with other parts of civil society, such as independent media, opposition political parties, trade unions, artists, or some church representatives. Thanks to this mobilisation, it was possible to defeat the non-democratic regime of Vladimír Mečiar’s government in the 1998 elections. One of the first examples of mass cultural activism in the independent Slovakia can also be dated to this period. The protest activities of theatre-performers and other artists triggered a great response, resulting in the establishment of the *Save Culture Open Forum*. A broad front of protesting artists, students, and the academic intelligentsia was gradually created. In November 1996, these initiatives developed into a protest rally *Let’s Save Slovakia*, organised in Bratislava together with the political opposition (Bútorá et al., 2012: 20–22).

Boris Strečanský (2017: 95) called the time span of 1998–2004 the period of democratic consolidation. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda, Slovakia entered the European Union in 2004, which was an important psychological moment for the country in achieving democratic and political maturity, mainly when seen from the outside. From the inside, the reform of state institutions was transiting to a more open and responsible governance, which, however, proceeded slowly and the reforms often struggled with complicated bureaucracy, clientelism, and corruption.

The period after joining the European Union (2004–2010) was accompanied by growing activities of civil society organisations and their relationships with other partners, in particular with the government and businesses. These organisations sought to define their relationship with the state to stimulate necessary reforms, provide constructive criticism, and to achieve the improvement of the conditions for the civil society. From 2010, Slovakia faced growing polarisation in society. The main issues in which the civil society sector has also been involved cover human rights, family values, and LGBTI+ rights. The government’s efforts to prepare a strategy for human rights protection revealed growing differences between the liberal and the socially conservative (and often religiously inspired) civil society (Strečanský, 2017: 95).

Over the past decade, civic activism in Slovakia has grown in many areas, including new ones. Initiatives to combat neo-Nazi and anti-system displays are emerging, and the importance of online activism is also on the rise. Cultural and creative activism is developing as well, and new cultural and creative centres are being established, reflecting also on the current political and social events. The important topics addressed include the environmental and green sphere (in particular, climate changes) or the public space situation. These areas are also reflected in the growing manifestations of local activism, which can be found mostly in Bratislava and in major towns. We can mention several such activities.

The development of cycling policy and the state of public spaces are addressed by the initiative *Cyklokoalícia (Cycling Coalition)*, which supports, among other things, the *Critical Mass* event – a regular cycling tour through the streets of Bratislava for the improvement of cyclists' conditions. The aim of the *Zelená hliadka (Green Patrol)* initiative is to improve the state and cleanness of the public space, including waste collection, liquidation of illegal dumps, or the efforts to reduce visual smog and illegal advertising spaces. The project *Mestské zásahy (Urban Interventions)* aims at dealing with urban space issues and draw attention to the different ways and functions of using the public space. Similar issues are tackled by the initiative *Vnútroblok (Courtyard)*, the activities of which are based mainly on the community gardens concept. Especially popular with the inhabitants of Bratislava is the regular event *Dobrý trh (Good Market)*, held since 2011 at three locations – at Panenská Street, Jakubovo Square or within the Old Market Hall premises. The purpose of this initiative is to revive the urban space through artists' performances, art installations and workshops, and the support of designers, small producers, and home-made products. Similar urban markets are held, for instance, in Trnava under the name *Trnavský rínek*, in Trenčín (*Trenčín na korze*) or in Nitra (*trafo.TRH*). Popular events focusing on different types of street food and drinks also contribute to the revival of the public space – the *Street Food Park* held around the Old Market Hall in Bratislava and the *Košice Street Food Festival* in front of Úsmev Cinema.

The examples listed above show that civic activism in Slovakia is undergoing significant changes. The number of active citizens is increasing, and their thematic activities are expanding mainly thanks to the internet and easier access to information and people's foreign experiences. As we shall see with the example of Nová Cvernovka, new topics and concepts related to various spheres of life are coming to the fore. The activation of young people is important as well. The events of the past years showed that their activities and initiatives reacting to the current social and political events may lead to greater mobilisation of people. For instance, the civic initiative *Za slušné Slovensko (For a Decent Slovakia)* repeatedly attracted tens of thousands of citizens to Slovak streets. We can also mention the initiative *Stojíme pri kultúre (We Stand by Culture)*, founded by the students of the Academy of Fine Arts, which was able to bring together a large part of the cultural and artistic community in Slovakia.

## Chapter 2:

### **SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE THEORETICAL CONCEPT OF TRANSACTIONAL ACTIVISM**

The introductory part of the book explained, among other things, the objectives, methodology, and the circumstances of my field research. Equally important is the theoretical embedding that directs researchers' steps in the field, draws their attention to important phenomena, and offers them the possibility to analyse the findings. The main analytical tool of my research has been the theoretical concept of transactional activism. My interest in these issues was shaped while conducting the research, in which I identified a wide spectrum of cooperation projects within Nová Cvernovka. For a complex study of the diverse manifestations of civic activism in this cultural and creative centre, a broader theoretical background was important – the theory of social movements. This background enabled me to focus on the various contexts of social movements and civil society – on their mutual relations with the urban environment, their specific features in the countries of the socialist past and, eventually, on the meaning and mechanisms of different types of cooperation within transactional activism. It is this theoretical 'narrowing' that is the subject of this chapter. Let us commence with the question: What is a social movement?

A social movement can be defined as a community whose identity is based on the perception of a common goal. Individuals participate in the actions of a social movement, perceiving a common goal, which is to bring about social change. Such movements are characterised by 'fluid', indeterminate membership and by the important role of collective identity (Gläser, 2004: 7). Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani (1999: 16) define social movements as informal networks based on shared convictions and solidarity, which are mobilised by conflicting questions through the frequent use of various forms of protests. In expert literature, we can also find the term 'new social movements' or a division into old and new social movements. The beginnings of the 'old' ones date back to the 19th century and relate to the processes of industrialisation, urbanisation, and struggle of the working class for their rights. Their social basis was defined by the boundaries of class, nation, and social conditions. They raised mainly economic demands, but could also address political and moral issues, such as democratisation, voting right, and equality. The old social movements were often local, and, at times, they grew into revolutionary or reform processes at the national and international

level – like during the revolutionary wave in 1848 or the uprising in Russia in 1917 (Feixa – Pereira – Juris, 2009: 426).

The so-called Chicago School of Sociology played an important role in the subsequent development of the study of social movements and the urban environment. During the early decades of the 20th century, it was characterised by emphasising the meaning of the empirical research of the urban environment – not only by means of quantitative sociological methods, but also using anthropological research methods and techniques (e.g. participant observations, informal interviews, and biographical methods). Topics related to metropolitan areas and social problems arising from life in a large city came to the fore, such as adaptation and accommodation in an urban environment, crime, ghettoisation, and poverty (Bitušíková, 2003: 11). The activities of the Chicago School of Sociology largely influenced the research on social movements as well, mainly thanks to the authors who studied collective action, such as Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess and Herbert Blumer. These researchers focused on the processes by means of which actors constantly create meanings through social interactions (Morris – Herring, 1987).

Since the 1970s, there has been a growing interest in social movements and other forms of collective action mainly in the field of political sciences, history, sociology, social anthropology, philosophy, and in interdisciplinary fields, such as gender studies and ecology. Social movements began to be perceived as a key to exploring social structures, practices, and meanings. They were based on the crisis of modernity and represented a new understanding of political and social life, resulting in the creation of new collective identities as well as cultural and social forms which responded to the crisis of many societies and economies (Escobar, 1992: 396). This was followed by the concept of new social movements presented by Alain Touraine (1985) and Alberto Melucci (1980, 1985). New social movements reach beyond the class conflict, which was the central theme of the research on older social movements, and reflect the transition to the new post-industrial society. The examples of such movements include feminist movements, peace movements, human rights movements, green movements, or movements against globalisation (Bitušíková, 2015a: 328–329).

By the end of the 1980s, the field of research on social movements in Europe was very fragmented also because of its rootedness in the national traditions of individual countries. This scenario began to evolve towards progressive integration only at the beginning of the 1990s. Since 2003, the European community of researchers specialised in social movements has become consolidated, as well as differentiated into several lines of thematic fragmentation (Diani – Císař, 2014 cit. in Fillieule – Accornero, 2016: 5–6). The new theoretical orientations and themes include a reconsideration of civil society and the state, the importance of micro-sociology and the daily life policy, new types of pluralist democracies, and alternative ways of satisfying basic needs. Experts began to emphasise the cultural

and symbolic aspects of social movements, which brought challenges for social anthropology as well (Escobar, 1992: 403). The raising of new issues has also led to the emergence of various approaches to the research on social movements. Some of them focus on collective identity issues or examine the creation of social networks and the dissemination of social movements, while others study new types of social movements. Their common denominator is interest in how people think about the world and about their action, in what way they attach a meaning to cultural products, and how they interpret their dissatisfaction and the feelings of injustice associated with politics and the functioning of society (Baumgarten – Daphi – Ullrich, 2014: 2). The changes occurring in the urban environment have also been an important area within social movements, stimulating the study and theoretical grasping of urban social movements.

### **Urban social movements**

Since the 1960s, urban social movements have been conceptualised as a special form of new social mobilisation, stemming from the economic, social, cultural, and political transformation of capitalist societies. The changes occurring within the urban environment were also an important factor, called ‘urban revolution’ by Henri Lefebvre (2003: 5). He defines this term as a transformation process from the period in which growth and industrialisation models, plans, and patterns prevail, until the period when the seeking of solutions to urban problems begins to domineer. This transition may be sudden, gradual, as well as planned. Jacobsson (2015b: 8) stresses that it is important to study urban social movements as an autonomous phenomenon, without dividing them to new (based mainly on the study of identity) and old social movements which deal predominantly with economic and social issues. Urban social movements also relate to phenomena such as poverty or homelessness and use the action repertoire of new social movements. One such example is cultural and art activism which often combines fine arts, theatre, and music with issues related to the public space and social exclusion.

Urban social movements are built on a community with a municipal basis and the focus of their activities is the urban environment (Fainstein – Fainstein, 1985: 189). Before they were conceptualised, this environment was studied mainly with the emphasis on community and social integration, neglecting topics such as the political economy of the development of localities and conflicts of interests. One of the first scientists to fill this gap was Manuel Castells. In his work *The Urban Question* (1972), he introduced a model of urban system dynamics with a single mechanism of structural changes. Castells called it urban social movements. In addition, the citizens of many settlements around the world simultaneously mobilised themselves in response to various problems in the urban environment

(Pruijt, 2007: 5115). Castells (1983: 305) considers urban movements an expression of town-oriented mobilisation with the aim to influence social change. In his opinion, this occurs mainly by pursuing three objectives: (1) realisation of collective consumption (associated with public services or housing, for instance); (2) strengthening of cultural identity and bi-directional communication instead of “top-down” information flows; and (3) support of local and regional self-governments and the autonomy of urban communities.

The ‘right to the city’ became an important slogan of urban social movements, inspired mainly by the work of French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre *Le Droit À La Ville* (1968, in English: *The Right to the City*). What Lefebvre understood under this slogan was a set of various rights, including the right to information, the right to the use of urban space, and access to services (Lefebvre, 1991: 34, cit. in Domaradzka, 2018). It should be added, though, that different urban movements interpret this slogan in different ways and not all of them follow the original ideas of Lefebvre. The concept of the ‘right to the city’ is often understood also as a complex of specific laws, such as the right to housing, social assistance, work, leisure, information, association, healthcare, education, culture, security, etc. The aim of this definition is to lobby for policies and legislation that link the development of settlements to social justice. The critics of this approach note that their recipients are primarily local authorities which are willing to apply the principle of good self-government by means of instruments based on participatory budgets and transparent governance methods. Even though these instruments are often useful, they do not affect the essence of the problem of uneven distribution of power. On the other hand, the problem of the general category ‘citizens’ is the assumption of the existence of a relatively cohesive civic sphere which, however, does not take into account the different access to power among civil society actors (Domaradzka, 2018: 613–614).

In 1992, social anthropologist Arturo Escobar (1992: 396) criticised the invisibility of urban social movements in anthropology. Ever since, several anthropologists began to deal with this issue, mainly from the top-down perspective and with an emphasis on key actors, leaders, and participants (Bitušíková, 2015b: 117). Current research also tackles the constant processes and changes in the urban environment that affect urban social movements. The restructuring of cities all around the world is accompanied by intense development in central business districts where the construction of new infrastructure and housing projects may lead to gentrification, displacement, traffic congestion, loss of comfort and the lack of democratic participation. The urban social movements dealing with these issues reflect on major shifts in urban policies (Ivanou, 2010: 16–17).

## **The view of theoretical literature on civic activism and urban social movements in Central and Eastern Europe**

Having presented the evolution of thoughts on (urban) social movements at the theoretical level, we shall now move to the post-socialist region of Central and Eastern Europe, as we should not ignore the socialist past of our country when studying urban social movements and civic activism in Slovakia. This historic stage has an impact on many spheres of life even today, including the functioning of civil society. The works of scientists dealing with urban social movements and civic activism issues in Central and Eastern European countries contribute to the theoretical explanation of this influence, in particular the works by Swedish sociologist Kerstin Jacobsson, Czech sociologist Ondřej Císař, American sociologist Sidney Tarrow, political scientist Tsveta Petrova, and others. It was specifically their publications that I used when analysing civic activism in Nová Cvernovka. The prevalence of sociologists in the name list of these experts can be explained by the fact that anthropological research of urban social movements in the Central and Eastern European region is rather scarce (Bitušíková, 2015a: 333).

Even though Central and Eastern Europe is not a homogenous region and processes such as urbanisation, gentrification or privatisation do not influence the different locations of this space in the same manner, Kerstin Jacobsson and Elżbieta Korolczuk (2019) assume that there are reasons to study urban activism as a whole. In their opinion, Central and Eastern Europe has been characterised over the past decades by the fast liberalisation of housing and urban policies by opening these fields to market forces, among other things. This development was followed by problems, such as inadequate state policies and zone planning, conflicts concerning property restitution and privatisation, deterioration of the condition of housing stock, low level of construction of new social housing, increased rent and prices of electricity, gentrification and social polarisation, as well as large-scale privatisation and commercialisation of the public space. These issues constitute a fertile ground for the emergence of urban social movements and various civic activism initiatives.

By referring to theoretical literature on urban social movements in our historical and geographical context, I do not intend to state that the manifestations of civic activism involved in the development of Nová Cvernovka automatically show traits of urban social movements. Nevertheless, these theoretical works are well applicable in the analysis of the various forms of civic activism in cities. They offer a classification of the different types of civic participation in the Central and Eastern European region, explaining the degree of and reasons for their existence in the context of the post-socialist development of society. Another important benefit is the reassessment of the statements on a weakened civil sector with predominant demobilisation and growing political apathy, so common in social sciences in the 1990s.

The scientific works by Jacobsson can be considered the most significant and most complex contributions to the understanding of urban social movements, mobilisation, and activation in Central and Eastern Europe (Bitušíková, 2015a: 331–332). Jacobsson (2015b: 7) defines social movements as collective actions aimed to question and change the current state by inhabitants who share common goals and do so in an interaction with the elites, authorities, or opponents. It is important to note that social movements are not necessarily involved in constant mobilisation and should not be understood only by seeing collective actions and protest events. We must also consider their latent aspects, like networks and relationships between actors. These hold a central position also in transactional activism, which is widespread in the region.

Jacobsson (2015a) emphasises the importance of urban activism and urban grassroots mobilisation in Central and Eastern European countries. Under this type of local activism, she means people's initiatives addressing the problems of daily life in cities. It is often related to the public space, life in the neighbourhood, or sub-cultures, such as collective actions mobilised without the involvement of a formal organisation, characterised by many events with a few participants. Their action repertoire often uses the *do it yourself* (DIY) concept, as well as culture and art tools (Jacobsson, 2015b: 14). This type of activism may escape the attention of scientists studying the civil sector in these countries, if they focus only on formal non-governmental and advocacy-oriented organisations or on protest events and mass demonstrations. Jacobsson (ibid.) notes that this local, 'self-organised' civic activism is the most frequent kind of civic activism in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic. This type of collective mobilisations is generally small in size, but frequent. The growing activism of local inhabitants updates and reviews the picture of post-socialist civil societies as weak, passive, and dependent on sponsors (often also from abroad). Unlike the non-governmental civil society, which evolved with foreign support during the first decade of the political and economic transformation, this type of urban activism is funded almost exclusively from domestic resources and from grassroots – if it is financed at all, since it is often based on voluntary work. In addition, civic activism in the urban context offers evidence of strengthening internal structure of civil society and its relationships with the public authorities.

The scientists studying urban mobilisation in Western Europe and Northern America often focus on the movements which attack neoliberalism at the discursive level, e.g. on 'right to the city' activism or on protest against austerity policies. However, a different perspective needs to be applied to the understanding of urban activism in the post-socialist context. It is more useful to focus on people's daily lives or on the politics of small things (Goldfarb, 2006) and its links to collective struggles in the urban environment. This is proven by the story of Cvernovka, in which we can find several examples of activities to embellish the surroundings, or initiatives expressing disapproval of the demolition of

the 'old' Cvernovka buildings. Social scientist Piotr Goldstein (2017) calls these manifestations 'everyday, discrete activism' and considers them a special form of active citizenship. It is less radical and has a longer duration compared to engagement in non-governmental organisations or social movements, and often useful in cases where other forms of activism appear to be ineffective. In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, many activists fight against the negative impacts of privatisation and marketisation by addressing their demands to the local authorities or by creating self-help communities without explicitly questioning neoliberal institutions and ideologies. Hence, activists are not only against specific policies, but also propose new ways of achieving democracy at the local level (Jacobsson – Korolczuk, 2019).

According to Jacobsson (2015b: 11), the reason for growing urban activism in Central and Eastern European countries lies in the processes of post-socialist transformation, privatisation, and public space issues. The socialist regime had a great impact on the form of places and public space in the region. This process was controlled from the top by the Communist Party. In the case of Bratislava, it was manifested by the effort to link the city to the legitimisation of the Communist government's power; involve the city in contemporary social changes and processes; and appropriate the urban space and the physical and mental change of Bratislava citizens (Janto, 2017: 174). These steps resulted, for instance, in the demolition of many historical objects as well as entire city districts (e.g. Podhradie and Vydrlica) and extensive construction of prefab housing estates (ibid.: 178). After the fall of the socialist regime, the countries of the region shifted from centralised to random and often chaotic development and growth of cities. Privatisations and restitutions of urban lands significantly influenced and changed the public urban space. It was not until the turn of the millennium that new major plans and city development and administration concepts began to be produced in larger cities, and citizens' opinions began to be heard to a greater extent. Many urban activism initiatives thus emerge as a result of bad infrastructure and unsatisfactory condition of public spaces. The inhabitants living in the vicinity of new buildings are mobilised along with the densification of construction. Activism in the field of cultural heritage protection and mobilisation against gentrification are also frequent. On the other hand, there is cultural and artistic activism which, on the contrary, may stimulate the gentrification process (Jacobsson, 2015b: 13).

The study of urban social movements is characterised by a division into protest movements and social movements that offer help or services. According to Jacobsson (2015a), this view is not useful in understanding collective action in the countries of this region. Here, urban movements usually go beyond this dichotomy and are multi-functional – they focus on practical solutions to problems and constitute an opposition capable of organising protests. The crossing of the borders of the national, civil, and political sphere to achieve collective action represents an

important challenge in post-socialist societies in overcoming political disillusion, general distrust, and the preferring of individualist strategies in problem solving. Another challenge and potential problem relate to the professionalisation of some third-sector actors. Many, initially mobilising, initiatives based on people's activities became formal non-governmental organisations. This takes place mainly due to financing and economic dependence on project grants. This can, however, lead to deradicalisation and the abandonment of the original goals and demands of these activities (Piotrowski, 2015: 9).

An important issue in these countries is their socialist past and the degree of influence of this development on social movements. The civil society in Central and Eastern Europe has gone through massive changes throughout the past three decades: from state controlled social life during the communist era through 'liberal' activism sponsored from abroad during the first years of the transition up to the current, more diversified social life and activism. The social movements in these countries combine the elements of these periods which interact with each other. What we can find there are old associations that have meanwhile undergone a reform, Western-type non-governmental organisations, local activism, as well as spontaneous mobilisations assisted by the internet and the social media (Jacobsson, 2015b: 3). As the above paragraph suggests, it is important to take into account the post-socialist context, which, however, cannot explain each and every difference from Western European countries. Some authors (e.g. Buyandelgeriyn, 2008; Mizielinska – Kulpa, 2011) even argue that the designation of the countries of this region as 'post-socialist' three decades after the political and economic transition brings implicit assumptions about their backwardness and efforts to 'catch up' with Western European countries in terms of their development (Jacobsson, 2015b: 10).

However, it may take decades to overcome the consequences of socialism. One of the major impacts in the field of social movements and civic activism is people's distrust in politicians, public authorities as well as collective actions initiated from the above. Since socialism was based on a ritualised version of political mobilisation, collective actions were perceived (and are still perceived in the minds of many) as the heritage of socialism even after the fall of the regime. The protest concept can be still considered a way of coping with the non-democratic process, and not as the way of resolving problems under democratic conditions. Hence, political freedom acquired in the new democratic regimes was not considered a possibility for expressing actual social needs for a long time, but rather an opportunity for not participating at all. This resulted in people's commonly low involvement in social movements which, according to Western observers, corresponded to political apathy (Císař, 2013b: 995).

Nevertheless, three decades after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the impacts of post-socialism on social movements are gradually disappearing. As we shall see in connection with the activities of Nová Cvernovka, a 'second generation'

of activists in the region is emerging, focusing rather on local issues, yet in the context of global problems. They largely build also on their experience gained abroad. In addition, urban social movements and initiatives are on the rise, aiming not only at direct activities and confrontation, but also at the building of communities and identity. These examples suggest a paradigmatic shift in the social movements of Central and Eastern Europe (Piotrowski, 2015: 11).

### **Definition of the theoretical concept of transactional activism**

The central theoretical concept of this monograph is transactional activism, which was for the first time defined by Petrova and Tarrow (2007). To overcome the arguments about a weak and poorly developed civil sector in Central and Eastern European post-socialist countries, they conceptualised civic activism in two dimensions: individual and relational. They call the individual level participatory activism, understanding it as people's participation in civil life, in formal organisations, activities of interest groups, voting, and elections. It was this area that was a frequent subject of research and surveys on the civil society of post-socialist countries, which gave rise to the prevailing opinion on the weakness and poor development of civil society in the region. On the other hand, with respect to the relational dimension, Petrova and Tarrow identified in these countries a boom in civil society based on lateral relationships between different groups and organisations, as well as vertical relationships between them and public actors. They call this dimension of participation transactional activism, which captures whether and how voluntary and advocacy-oriented groups interact with one another, with political parties, or holders of power (Petrova – Tarrow, 2007: 79).

Having said that, I define transactional activism as the shaping of permanent or temporary links within civic activism between different actors – predominantly within organised non-state entities (e.g. civic associations), but also among these entities, holders of power, and other institutions (Petrova – Tarrow, 2007: 79). Mario Diani (2011) calls them 'weak organisational links', since they are based primarily on the exchange of resources and are reflected in the form of cooperation between organisations, and not in the form of social links created through shared membership, as in the case of strong organisational links. The creation of weak organisational links is also helped by the fact that civil society organisations are usually embedded in a broader organisational network defined by different types of mutual transactions. These may concern cooperation between organisations, exchange of information, the lending of resources, and overlapping of the areas of interest. Only rarely we can find an organisation which is completely isolated from these transactions (Císař, 2013d).

The dichotomy of participatory and transactional activism distinguishes between two forms of what activism is able to achieve. While participatory

activism refers to the ability of activists to mobilise individuals, i.e. to bring them to participation, transactional activism captures their ability to enter in transactions. Even though transactional activism is often associated with advocacy-oriented organisations, in fact, it represents a broader concept, involving all kinds of transactions, including the exchange of resources, coalitions built around various political issues, cooperation with civil society actors across sectors, and interaction with the elites. The concept of transactional activism enables to see relatively rich interactions between different actors of civil society, even though such actors usually lack the ability to mobilise a large number of individuals. Transactional activism is therefore a characteristic feature of civic activism in the post-socialist environment (Císař – Navrátil, 2010: 3–4). As a result, this term was taken over also by other scientists dealing with social movements in this region (e.g. Piotrowski, 2015; Císař, 2013b; Bitušíková, 2015a). However, the environment of Nová Cvernovka suggests that transactional activism may also lead to the mobilisation of people, if it reflects current social, political, or environmental issues. Many scholars have been exploring transactional activism mainly in the context of political activism. However, the case of Cvernovka confirms that the activities based on cooperation and the exchange of resources is the preferred strategy also in other types of civic participation.<sup>7</sup>

Particularly the works by Císař have significantly contributed to the understanding of this type of civic activism in our region. Císař (2013b) elaborated on the ideas by Petrova and Tarrow, classifying four types of civic activism in post-socialist countries. He calls the first two ones participatory and transactional activism and understands them similarly as Petrova and Tarrow. Císař considers radicalism to be the third type, manifested mainly in the form of demonstrations and direct actions.<sup>8</sup> The fourth type is civic self-organisation, which often consists of a collective action mobilised by engaging any formal organisation or group.<sup>9</sup> Císař (ibid.) emphasises the importance of transactional activism of the above-mentioned types and explains its widespread presence in the region mainly with the poor mobilisation ability of civil society in the region. According to him, this type of activism suggests that, despite the high number of individuals not

<sup>7</sup> My research has led to several conclusions that complement and extend the hitherto valid view of the theoretical concept of transactional activism. I deal with these conclusions in the chapter “Suggestions for the research on the theoretical concept of transactional activism” on page 102.

<sup>8</sup> According to Císař (2013b), radicalism does not mobilise a large number of members, because, in general, its demands are not considered socially acceptable. It should be added, though, that initiatives claiming radical ideas have begun to gain momentum in Slovakia over the recent years, often largely inspired by fascism or nationalism.

<sup>9</sup> This type includes minor non-violent protests and petitions. Episodic mass mobilisations, characterised by a large number of participants and short duration, are less frequent in the region (Císař, 2013c: 143). However, the example of the protests *For a Decent Slovakia*, reacting to the murder of journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová, shows that extraordinary events can mobilise mass protests also in Slovakia.

directly politically active, a relatively efficient layer of civic activism has evolved after the fall of socialism. Even in case no individual participation is present at the micro-level, we can observe many activities at the organisational level.

The important role of transactional activism in the Central and Eastern European region stems from the tendency of the civil society actors to pursue their objectives through direct contact with politicians and public authorities instead of relying on mass mobilisations and protests. Transactional activism involves mainly the building of coalitions between actors and negotiations with the elites with the aim to solve problems (Petrova – Tarrow, 2007: 87). This form of mobilisation is based on the exchange (transaction) of resources, information, knowledge, and experience between organisations. The repertoire of actions primarily includes lobbying, the preparation of independent expertise, and the influencing of the public opinion, which often fit the portfolio of non-governmental organisations (Piotrowski, 2015: 6). Cultural strategies are used as well, such as performances, exhibitions, and festivals. Thematically, transactional activism in the region is related to ecology, the environment, and civil rights. Activists' demands are economic in exceptional cases only (Císař, 2013b: 996).

### **Operationalisation of transactional activism in the context of my research**

The definitions of transactional activism are consistent in that this type of initiatives and activities involves networking, cooperation, and communication with other organisations and public institutions (Císař, 2018). But what exactly do we mean by the terms cooperation, communication, and networking?

Tomáš Diviák and Jaromír Mazák (2017) argue that there is very little insight into the nature of horizontal transactions and that the current conceptualisation of transactional activism is used too easily in almost any operationalisation that involves certain relationships. However, there is a big difference between simply exchanging information or politely sharing internet contents and more engaged cooperation. To gain a deeper perspective, it is necessary to theoretise transactional activism more specifically. These authors therefore propose to conceptualise the horizontal dimension of transactional activism onto transactional links and interconnected transactional links. The first category represents a broad notion of transactional activism, involving any type of cooperation or positive exchange between organisations, including mutual communication, considering others' opinions, or sharing content on online social networks. In my research, I focused on the latter category – interconnected transactional links as strong ties based on the division of work between organisations. This kind of organisation thus enables the allocation of tasks to different actors so that they can mutually benefit from their cooperation. Diviák and Mazák identified five key types

of interconnected transactional links: (1) analysis of legal regulations and expert comments on legislative proposals, (2) coordination of the individual organisations and working groups, (3) public relations and project 'marketing', (4) fundraising, and (5) the 'opening of doors', i.e. the arrangement of contacts and the provision of social capital, mainly from the previous activities of the organisation. It should be noted, though, that these characteristics concern mainly political activism and advocacy-oriented organisations the purpose of which is mainly advocacy, the influencing of the public opinion, and the bringing about some political change. However, in the case of Nová Cvernovka, we speak about the manifestations of cultural and artistic activism which often focus on educating the public and on commenting on current political and social issues. This happens mainly in the form of various public events or petition initiatives. With respect to Nová Cvernovka, we should add several more to the five above-listed types of interconnected transactional links: the organisation of cultural, artistic, and educational events, and cooperation in the field of petition initiatives and joint statements. Within the right tangle of interactions and cooperation, it is difficult to 'measure' the strength of such links at the empirical level. In addition, the boundaries between the different kinds of cooperation may disappear. For example, in the case of petition initiatives, it is not necessarily only about the presence of the organisation's name in the list of signatories. There may be several other activities behind this action, such as cooperation in the drafting of the statement, organisation of events, participation in protest events, or active communication with the media while promoting the initiative.

Within the operationalisation of transactional activism, it is also important to deal with the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the links. The typology by Diviák and Mazák, as described in the previous paragraph, is about horizontal links, since it refers to transactional activism from the point of view of civic activism organisations. Horizontal links mean cooperation and transactions between civic activism entities, while the vertical dimension refers to transactions between civic activism entities, institutions, and public actors. However, the position of Nová Cvernovka in this imaginary scheme, defined by horizontal and vertical transactions, is unclear and depends on specific manifestations of activism. This cultural and creative centre can be found somewhere on the boundary between an organisation and an institution. The organisational dimension of Nová Cvernovka is represented by the Cvernovka Foundation as the manager of the cultural and creative centre, therefore being the basic organisational unit of my analysis of transactional activism. At the same time, Nová Cvernovka as such offers an institutional framework for the studios, initiatives, and organisations based there. It is for this reason that I did not divide the specific manifestations of cooperation projects and transactions into horizontal and vertical. Such division might narrow the perspective of transactional activism related to Nová Cvernovka and bring an implicit assumption on the position of Nová Cvernovka

(or Cvernovka Foundation) within specific manifestations of transactional activism.

Under the notion of transactional activism, what I was observing during my research were the interconnected transactional links of Cvernovka Foundation in the field of civic activism with other organisations and initiatives (or active individuals) operating within or beyond Nová Cvernovka; with cultural and creative centres in Slovakia and abroad; with cultural and educational institutions and local authorities; and with the media and the public. Under interconnected transactional links, I observe concrete examples of active and targeted cooperation which, in the case of Nová Cvernovka, have the form of mainly joint projects; cooperation in organising cultural, artistic and educational events (joint preparation of the programme and contents of these events or the provision of spaces as well as physical or technological infrastructure); the set-up of and entering into common platforms and initiatives; the use of the experience and knowledge of the Cvernovka Foundation in an effort to influence public policies and targeted communication and cooperation with the media with the aim to inform the public about the activities of Nová Cvernovka; and the gaining of supporters.

As we shall see in the analytical part of the book, the theoretical concept of transactional activism often reflects the terms ‘resources’ and ‘mobilisation’, which deserve a few lines here. In general, resources can be defined as inventories or the supply of money, materials, personnel, or other assets that an individual or an organisation can draw for its effective functioning (Oxford University Press, 2019). In the context of social movements, a resource can be anything that organisations and movements need in the process of pursuing their goals (Tilly, 1978). In the book, I use the division into five types of resources according to Bob Edwards and others (Edwards – McCarthy, 2004; Edwards – Gillham, 2013) – moral, cultural, human, material, and social/organisational.<sup>10</sup>

Under mobilisation, I mean the processes by means of which the group or organisation ensures collective control over the resources needed for a collective action (Jenkins, 1983: 532). Originally, these terms closely related to the theory of resource mobilisation. This theory evolved in the 1970s with the aim to elucidate the origins, meaning, and effects of social movements, and related to the rejection of the prevailing pluralistic assumption according to which all parties involved in the political process have a big chance of having their demands heard. The scientists dealing with the theory of resource mobilisation sought to understand the ways social actors mobilise themselves effectively in an effort to achieve their goals in the field of social change (Edwards – Gillham, 2013: 1096). Hence, the research in this field focuses on resources controlled by an organisation against

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<sup>10</sup> For a description of these five types of resources see the sub-chapter “*Analysis of the Cvernovka Foundation’s resources*” on page 89.

mobilisation efforts, the processes by means of which the organisation collects resources and directs them to bring about social change, and on the extent to which people outside the organisation increase the resource reserve (Jenkins, 1983: 532). This theory emphasises the importance of structural factors, such as availability of resources for the collective team and the position of individuals within social networks. It also explores the rationality of participation within social movements, as participation is not considered to be the consequence of predisposing psychological traits, but the result of rational decision-making processes in which people consider the costs and benefits of participation (Klandermans, 1984: 583).

## Chapter 3:

### CULTURAL AND CREATIVE CENTRES IN SLOVAKIA

This book is the result of my long-term research on Nová Cvernovka – the place which brings together through its activities artists, cultural workers, civil activists, and new entrepreneurs, actively comments on current social and political issues, and provides its premises for a public programme that reflects many spheres. Before reading the next chapters, it is important to understand the overall story of Nová Cvernovka and, in the general sense, the functioning and specificities of such centres in Slovakia. It is a challenge to find a single name for them in the Slovak context. In foreign expert literature, we can find terms like ‘creative cluster’ (Evans, 2009; Kind – Meier zu Köcker, 2012), ‘creative centre’ or ‘creative hub’ (Matheson – Easson, 2015; Virani, 2015), and ‘creative incubator’ (Franco – Haase, 2018). However, the differences between these terms are not clearly defined. The presence of the word ‘creative’ refers not only to the attribute as such, which is generally associated with innovativeness, creativity, and adequacy (Stokes, 2006: 1), but also to the concepts of creative economy, creative industry, and creative cities. I shall present them, including their critical reflection, in the next sub-chapter. They are relevant to my topic because the given concepts and their theses are often automatically linked to the functioning of these centres. This happens at the level of public policies as well as many scientific research projects, bringing to the fore the economic effect of such centres. However, as we shall see in the example of Nová Cvernovka, their activities can be much more diverse. For the sake of terminological consistency, I have decided to use the term cultural and creative centres, which does not necessarily mean that the other listed names are inappropriate and used in different contexts. In Slovak realities, I define cultural and creative centres as places that bring together people working in the cultural and creative sector, young entrepreneurs, artists, and non-profit organisations, engage them in various types of cooperation, and create cultural, artistic, or educational programmes for the public.

In connection with this type of centres, the term creative centre often appears in the Slovak public and media discourse without the attribute ‘cultural’. Many official documents and calls<sup>11</sup> by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, *Integrated Regional Operational Programme, Priority Axis 3 – Mobilisation of the creative potential in regions; Call for the establishment of creative centres (centralised support) and support of*

(or other ministries) use this equivalent as well, defining it as a place pursuing the growth of cultural and creative industry in the region. According to them, the activities of a creative centre aim at the development of creative talents, their business spirit, and the support of non-technological innovations using information technology, as well as the enhancement of demand for creative works (Ministry of Culture of the SR, 2019: 3). This perspective of the Ministry of Culture is largely inspired by the situation abroad where creative centres are closely linked to creative economy and creative industry concepts. However, in the Slovak context, this perspective does not necessarily reflect the whole reality, and these centres also have a significant added value, as they fulfil educational and social functions. I have therefore decided to use the term cultural and creative centres. The advantage of this term is that, in addition to the creative sector, it also comprises culture and art, which is important for the functioning of such centres in Slovakia. I base my approach on the division by Graeme Evans (2009), who makes a distinction between cultural and creative districts. Cultural districts focus on local development, protection, and support of identity, as well as local non-profit culture, while creative districts are more focused on business and innovations.

It is worth asking the question what I specifically mean by the term cultural and creative centres. Their activities in Slovakia usually overlap with the area of the so-called independent culture, even though the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic has initiated over the past 5 – 10 years centralised financial support for the establishment of creative centres, linked to the European Regional Development Fund. Nevertheless, the already functioning cultural and creative centres in Slovakia were usually established organically from the grassroots and are operated by non-profit organisations or civic associations. Therefore, the term independent cultural centres is also common, since they are primarily not organised by the state authorities or self-governments, and their principal objectives is not the generation of financial profit. It should be noted, though, that the degree of independence of these initiatives is questionable and hardly definable, since their existence depends also on formalised financing structures, and cooperation with municipal authorities or the management of self-governing regions is often present as well. This is the reason why I have chosen not to use the attribute ‘independent’ in the description of these initiatives. However, in practice, I shall refer mainly to this kind of cultural and creative centres. Apart from Nová Cvernovka, the best-known examples in Slovakia include Tabačka Kulturfabrik and Kasárne-Kulturpark in Košice; Stará tržnica (The Old Market Hall) in Bratislava; Žilina – Záríečie Station; Garden – Independent Culture

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*demand for creative work (emerging talents)* (Ministry of Culture of the SR, 2019) and *Centralised Support Model (Illustrative model of the functioning of creative centres under PA3 IROP)* (Ministry of Culture of the SR – Ministry of Economy of the SR, 2019).

Centre in Banská Bystrica; Banská Štiavnica Contemporary centre in Banská Štiavnica; Kláštor (Monastery) Cultural and Creative Centre in Rožňava; A4 – Space for Contemporary Culture in Bratislava; Platform 1–12 in Topoľčany, and others.

The activities of the cultural and creative centres in Slovakia reach out to several areas – culture, arts, creative industry, education, or civic activism. However, a deeper empirical insight into their actual functioning is still missing in our local context, which is necessary not only from the point of view of scientific knowledge, but also for an effective setting of public policies and support mechanisms of cultural and creative centres. It is therefore worth asking what specific functions and activities can we find in these centres? Foreign expert literature (e.g. Matheson – Easson, 2015; Virani, 2015) defines their functions mainly through the lens of the creative industry, considering co-working and business incubators or studios, which can also be found in Nová Cvernovka, as the basic components of the functioning of cultural and creative centres. Co-working provides a background for working, often also in the form of open spaces, where several workers or teams work within a single room. Business incubators offer targeted services and support to accelerate growth and the financial and operational stability of new entrepreneurs and start-ups. This takes place through the agglomeration of knowledge, shared use of resources, innovativeness, and competitiveness (Ayatse et al., 2017). Studios are based on a similar principle, although they focus mainly on artistic creations.

In Slovakia, cultural and creative centres are usually created in abandoned, unused buildings owned by cities or regional self-governments. There are different reasons for the abandonment of these sites, relating mainly to their function and type of ownership. Under the process of decentralisation after the fall of the regime, various buildings were entrusted to cities, city districts, and self-governing regions. However, this was accompanied by new duties and increased costs of operation and maintenance, as a result of which many of them are empty. In the case of former schools, hospitals or cultural houses, the reasons for their abandonment include socio-demographic changes. A certain role is played by the process of retreating industrialisation and strengthening globalisation. Many sites are abandoned because of the downsizing of industrial production. From the long-term perspective, the filling of unused buildings with new contents may be more beneficial for the given location and its inhabitants than a one-time financial profit from its sale. However, this benefit is hardly quantifiable, as it creates a non-linear relationship which places emphasis also on the social, cultural, and creative quality that supports community life (Sidorová et al, 2020: 21–22). One of the ways of using vacant buildings is their transformation into cultural and creative centres. These have the potential to bring new functions to the given city district and change its form. As previously mentioned, when reflecting on the impacts of these centres on the urban environment, experts,

researchers as well as politicians often use human creativity based concepts, as further discussed in the next sub-chapter.

### **Creative cities and creative industry concepts and their critical reflection**

As we have seen on the previous pages, the public policies of targeted establishment and support of cultural and creative centres in Slovakia emphasise mainly their economic benefits within the so-called creative economy. It is the consequence of a global trend, which has its roots in the theory of national and local competitiveness, as presented by US economist Michael E. Porter (1990) in the context of the global economy. By creating a concept of an industrial cluster, Porter promoted a new way of viewing international, state, and urban economies. Clusters are geographical concentrations of interlinked companies, specialised suppliers, service providers, and affiliated institutions in a specific area, which compete but also cooperate with each other (Porter, 1990). Deindustrialisation in the Western European countries and in the US in the 1960s and 1970s was accompanied by a transformation of urban regions, in which many extensive, unused spaces appeared. A similar process took place in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of socialism. These abandoned sites offered adequate premises for the activities of artists, creative people, and cultural activists. Initially, creative clusters evolved informally when artists and creative people were finding more affordable premises for the establishment of their studios. Over the past decade, such clusters and centres shifted from spontaneous organic development to a planned process managed by political programmes for economic and cultural prosperity (Marková, 2014: 45). They are based mainly on the concepts of creative economy, creative industry, and creative cities.

The social and economic changes of the past decades have raised a number of issues and challenges, such as suburbanisation, gentrification, social segregation, public space issues, the emergence of various subcultures, as well as increased crime. These phenomena significantly influenced (and still do) the contemporary urban environment. New approaches to the social and economic development of cities have come to the fore in public urban development policies – including those that use people's creativity. It is mainly a concept of creative cities that is based on the presence of the creative industry in the urban environment. Creativity in these concepts has the form of applying ideas and phantasy in practice by means of attributes such as intelligence, inventiveness, and the willingness to learn. It can originate from any source, though creativity is legitimised mainly in the different forms of art (Landry, 2005: 2).

Creativity began to be applied in the development of cities in the United Kingdom and the US in the 1990s. The origins of these concepts were inspired

by the New Labour regime in the United Kingdom (1997–2010), during which culture and creativity were gaining ground in the thinking of the then government about a knowledge-based economy and regeneration of cities. In the US, culture and creativity became important in the attempts to revitalise the disintegrating former industrial urban communities since the 1990s. Hence, initially, the ideas about the conceptualisation of culture and creativity were historically and geographically specific, but they gradually became globally mobile, influencing urban policies all over the world, mainly in the form of the creative cities concept (Borén – Young, 2016). This concept sees the main sources of urban development and of tackling urban issues in the creative industry and in the skills and knowledge of individuals, thus stressing the creation of a tolerant environment and different kinds of jobs. According to British urban planner Charles Landry (2008), creative cities should be characterised by adequate public policies enabling the joint operation and cooperation of urban culture, the media, the entertainment industry, and education. Creative cities should function beyond the boundaries of cultural activities and institutions, despite of these activities being naturally integrated in the system of functioning of such cities. Emphasis is placed on the image of the city, where cooperation by different actors is important – local public officials, entrepreneurs, civic activists, and volunteers (Zlatá, 2018: 31).

The principal theses of creative cities are based on the concept of a creative economy, which can be defined as a community where an important role is played by a creative labour force and creative firms that form groups and communities. It is the result of a shift from industrial economy to a knowledge-based one. The creative economy is based on the creative industry, with the evolution of which a new form of working class emerged – the creative class (Kloudová 2010). In his book *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money From Ideas* (2001), John Howkins systemised creative industries into fifteen sectors, namely: advertising, architecture, art, crafts, design, fashion, film, music, performing arts, publishing, research and development, software, toys and games (excluding video games), TV and radio, and computer games. This list became one of the most popular standards for presenting and assessing creative industry sectors at the global, national, as well as local levels (Levickaité, 2011: 83–85).

The application of the idea of creative cities in public policies became very popular all over the world mainly thanks to the works by US economist Richard Florida *The Rise of The Creative Class* (2002) and *Cities and the Creative Class* (2005). These have not only caused a boom in the scientific debate on this topic but have also influenced the development and planning of cities. This brings about a change in thinking and an effort to apply the basic principles of creative cities and spheres of culture and art in city planning, with different practical manifestations, such as reorganisation of the business environment in which businesses operating in the creative sphere and new marketing approaches come to the fore. When it comes

to the improvement of the socio-economic situation, the relationship between culture, art and technologies, and the support of unofficial networks and various civic initiatives are emphasised. The creative industry may have a potential also in preventing the moving of people from city centres to the peripheral areas. This occurs by improving the quality of public space, initiating the restoration of industrial districts and historical buildings, reviving the cultural and social life of the locations, and by a more effective use of the settlements' human capital. The application of these principles may also result in the creation of various characteristic local or regional brands, the presentation of the city with an emphasis on culture and art with the potential to attract tourists, and an impact on the identity of the city's inhabitants (Partners for Livable Communities, 2004).

Even so, the creative industry and creative cities concepts and the methods of their practical application are often criticised by experts. For instance, Andy C. Pratt (2008: 15) criticises the fact that the terms business, creativity, and innovation are perceived as individualistic, not social. In his opinion, being creative in a vacuum is not productive, and ideas and innovations have no value until they are applied and implemented. Hence, an idea as such will not bring anything without being implemented in practice, production, distribution, and consumption, whereas these processes themselves are collective – they do not require a heuristic approach and a series of interactions. Pratt therefore suggests using the terms creativity, culture, and innovation with great caution, noting that it is incorrect to idealise them.

Another weak point of these concepts is the absence of clear theoretical definitions of terms and an unclear boundary between the terms 'cultural' and 'creative'. Creativity in culture differs from other types of creativity, and its importance reaches beyond the limits of the knowledge-based economy. The current popular way of looking at the cultural sector as part of the broader creative economy makes it an integral part of the economic agenda (Galloway – Dunlop, 2007: 28–29). Another issue is the idealisation of these concepts and the uncritical acceptance of their basic theses without exploring local specificities at the level of states, regions, or cities. This relates mainly to the popularity and attractiveness of these ideas. Many cities are actively involved in the trend of designating cities as creative (or green or smart based on other development concepts), seeing an opportunity to attract investments in global economy and competition between cities.

The popularity and widespread presence of creative cities can be observed in Central and Eastern European countries. The conceptualisation of the use of culture and creativity in the development of cities coincide with the end of state socialism in this region (1989). The concept of creative cities offered attractive political solutions to cities which did not have to deal with the impacts of post-socialist transformation. In addition, these theses had an important symbolic value, as they represented an innovative development policy of towns in Western

Europe. The dissemination of the concept of creative cities was enhanced also thanks to the enlargement of the European Union, the influence of global institutions (e.g. UNESCO Creative Cities Network, founded in 2004), as well as European competitions between cities, focused on the use of culture (e.g. European Capital of Culture) (Borén – Young, 2016).

Nevertheless, the concept of creative cities is used with a relatively little development and review of the theory with regard to the specific features of the post-socialist environment. The theses of creative cities are rather recent, and their usability and effectiveness have not yet been sufficiently verified. The causalities of the concept are still being tested, and it is still questionable whether they can be generalised (Romein – Trip, 2012: 27). Policy makers should focus on the development of special and locally embedded creative sectors that reflect the strengths of the given region or city (Bontje et al., 2011: 99).

One of the approaches of experts and scholars to the issue of creative cities is to measure the economic effect of the creative industry at the global, national, or local level.<sup>12</sup> This usually happens by defining specific indicators and by using statistical methods. The statistical tools used to capture and evaluate the effectiveness of the different economic sectors may not be appropriate to express the activity of the creative sector. These statistical categories used at the national or European level are frequently too wide, as a result of which the collected data is not comparable (Kloudová, 2009: 251). One possible problem of excessively looking at culture and art through the lens of the economy is the fact that these two realities are not always compatible and that the mechanisms that are in place in the economy are not necessarily applicable in culture, and vice versa (Rehák, 2014: 601).

This phenomenon can also be observed when it comes to cultural and creative centres in Slovakia. Emphasis on the economic effect of the creative sphere and popularity of the concept of creative cities caused that public policies to support these cities prefer their economic benefits, paying less attention to other aspects of their functioning. In Slovakia, scientific research on the actual impacts of creative concepts on cities and on the functioning of cultural and creative centres is still absent, though it is a topical issue and a fertile research soil for many scientific disciplines, such as social anthropology, urban studies, sociology, human geography, economy, etc. The key to learning about this subject is also to focus on concrete case studies on cultural and creative centres. In the next chapter, we shall thus move from the theoretical level to an empirical perspective in introducing the history of Cvernovka.

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example: Boix et al., 2011; Martin et al., 2015; Kind – Meier zu Köcker, 2012; Hudec – Klasová, 2016.

## Chapter 4:

### THE STORY AND THE PRESENT OF NOVÁ CVERNOVKA

One of the most famous and largest cultural and creative centres in Slovakia is Nová Cvernovka in Bratislava. This chapter offers a detailed picture of its overall story from the establishment of a thread-making factory at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the functioning of creative and art studios in these premises and their relocation to Račianska Street up to the current state of the cultural and creative centre. I consider it important mainly with respect to the overall context of the monograph, since the next chapters will present concrete examples of civic activism within Nová Cvernovka as well as other accompanying elements of its functioning. To read these chapters, it is important to become familiar with the organic story of Cvernovka and the different events that influenced this development. For a more comprehensive introduction of the story of Cvernovka, I shall also quote the statements of my respondents who reflected in the interviews on the different events related to the development of the old or new (Nová) Cvernovka.

Another reason for writing this part is the need to describe the history of Cvernovka on the basis of the obtained research material, because this topic has so far been covered in literature only exceptionally, with the expert popularisation publication Cvernovka as the only exception (Csino – Mistrík, 2014).

#### **Cvernovka as a yarn- and thread-making factory**

The original Cvernovka, the yarn- and thread-making factory, was built at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, during the period of large-scale industrialisation of Bratislava. The factory was established thanks to foreign capital as well as the rich experience of the businessmen and owners of several factories in Austria and Great Britain. Two companies were the original owners of the site: the Salcher & Richter from Vienna and J. & P. Coats from Scotland as one of the largest textile companies in the world at that time. The establishment of the Hungarian Yarn Factory (*Magyar cérnagyár* in Hungarian, *Zwirnfabrik* in German) dates back to 1902. Initially, it had 640 employees, mostly women. The production and sale of products were successful, as with 993 employees Cvernovka was the largest industrial plant in Bratislava as soon as in 1910 (Kvardová, 2014: 6).

The Cvernovka complex gained its shape mainly thanks to the construction of the key buildings and halls in 1910–1914. The most valuable object of the entire site from the historical and architectonic perspective is the spinning mill, formerly also called ‘industrial palace’. Its construction system respects the size and performance of the machinery in it. The construction of the building consists of cast iron pillars made in the Budapest foundry Schlicker. Rail beams rest on these pillars, with a slightly convex roof. This created free space, the structure elements of which did not prevent the production processes (Kvardová, 2014: 15–17). The vibrant life of the factory and the atmosphere in Bratislava in the earlier half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is well described in a literal excerpt from the book *Dornkappel: A Suburb of Three Languages*, published in 1938:

*“One hundred, one hundred fifty girls and young women from Dornkappel, and twelve to seventeen men that worked in the yarn factory during this year’s season may no longer return to manual weaving. The factory is in English hands. At the end of May, it employed one thousand six hundred women and around one hundred sixty men. It is a massive, three-storey building at an area of over six acres. Through the massive grey cold stores and high iron ladders, you will immediately notice, you lucky wanderer that walked around England, that English capital has an imperative word.”* (Marko, 1938 cit. in Csino – Mistrík, 2014: 50)

As can be seen, the number of factory employees increased up to almost 1,800 during the inter-war period. After World War II, the company was nationalised and, from 1952, it operated under the name *Závody Medzinárodného dňa žien 8. marca, národný podnik Bratislava* (Works of the International Women’s Day of March 8, National Enterprise Bratislava). The plant reached its production peak in the 1960s when it employed 2,500 workers and even created its own handball club, which participated in the 1<sup>st</sup> women’s league. The decline in production and the economic transformation of the 1990s led to the gradual discontinuation of production, and the factory was finally shut down in 2004.<sup>13</sup>

### **Cvernovka as an artistic and creative community: ‘Old Cvernovka’**

The beginnings of today’s cultural and creative centre Nová Cvernovka date back to 2006, though this name was not yet common at that time. This place was commonly called ‘Cvernovka’. After the relocation and establishment of Nová Cvernovka, this period is usually referred to as ‘old Cvernovka’ (‘stará Cvernovka’).

<sup>13</sup> Source: <https://www.startitup.sk/pribeh-cvernovky-byvalej-tovarne-z-ktorej-sa-stalo-kulturne-centrum-bratislavy/> [03/02/2021]

The then owner of the former yarn-making factory site offered these premises for rent at a relatively low price, which raised the interest of artists and creatives. The price of the rent was favourable because the whole building was subject to bankruptcy proceedings and in bad condition, and the rent contracts were concluded for an indefinite period of time. The tenants were thus staying in the building in the state of uncertainty, as they could have been moved out at any time. Despite this situation, they divided the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the spinning mill building into independent art, design, and architectural studios by means of structural modifications carried out at their own expense. Otherwise, they left the interior in its original condition, with visible brick walls that contrasted with the metal frames of large windows. It was the variability and attractiveness of the spaces combined with the low rental price that was a great attraction for many artists and creatives despite of many limitations and the need to finance the structural modifications, as illustrated by the following words of a respondent:

*“In principle, what it worked like was that nobody from the owner would come to replace the bulb or fix the door. They did almost nothing to make life easier there. People had to do everything on their own, and perhaps this was the reason why they joined their forces. These people over there did not consider it to be a kind of a business park where all is done for them; they had to take care of it themselves and learn to work together. On the other hand, it was not an ideal condition. One wouldn’t normally bring a client there” (M\_1982).*

Presence in these industrial premises and the uncertainty resulting from a large number of demolished industrial and technical heritage sites in Bratislava raised the issue of conservation of the Cvernovka site. Initially, the buildings of the spinning-mill, dyeing shop, finishing mill, and engine room were proposed to be protected; however, only the spinning-mill building was finally declared a national cultural heritage site in 2007, which met with a critical response by the Cvernovka tenants and the public. It was in the spinning-mill building that Galleria Cvernovka was created, operating in 2010–2013. These premises resembled studios, however, thanks to their larger areas they offered the possibility of organising cultural events. For instance, the sale of artistic and design products at the *Urban Market* was a popular event, visited by around 1,000 people before the Christmas of 2010. Another important event was the award ceremony of the National Design Prize 2009, organised by the Slovak Design Centre, a contributory organisation of the Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with the Ministries of Economy and Education. The awarding of the Oskár Čepan Prize<sup>14</sup> also took place in Galleria Cvernovka, accompanied by an exhibition of finalists, as well as the defence of students’ works of the Academy of Fine Arts,

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<sup>14</sup> Oskár Čepan Prize is a contest of visual artists up to 40 years, launched in 1996.

workshops in collaboration with the Slovak University of Technology, fashion shows, and corporate events (Csino – Mistrík, 2014: 276).

Cvernovka gradually became a new, popular point of culture in Bratislava. People could also visit Café Cverna or Alexis bookstore. Its interior, designed by architects Martin Jančok and Aleš Šedivec, won the CEZAAR Prize of the Slovak Chamber of Architects in 2011, and the US web server Flavorwire ranked it among the twenty most beautiful bookstores in the world. This attractive bookstore was situated within the Cvernovka complex since 2010, but was forced to close after three years, failing to conclude a contract for further lease with the then owner of Cvernovka.

The physical proximity offered the tenants of around 35 studios the opportunity to collaborate in various projects. Throughout the years, a community of artists and people working in the creative sphere was created at Cvernovka. It was quite a closed group of people, and the public had the opportunity to visit the Cvernovka studios on May 1 each year as part of the event Open Studios Day, held in 2010 for the first time. As the following press release suggests, this event was born at the grassroots and its beginnings were characterised by spontaneity and casualness.

*“OPEN STUDIOS DAY! Come and celebrate the Labour Day in the former Women’s Day Factory at Páričkova 18. The studios will be open for you from 10am to 8pm, and will exhibit the projects that were created there; in addition, Vilo will cook a Breton fish soup, the girls will bake something for sure, and if Mr. Repaský does not leave for Liptov during the weekend, there will also be a guided tour through Cvernovka. This and much more is awaiting you on Saturday, May 1, at Páričkova 18, from 10.00 to 20:00 o’clock.”* (Press release on the first Open Studios Day, held on May 1, 2010. Source: Csino – Mistrík, 2014: 187)

Eventually, the Open Studios Day became an annual part of the functioning of Nová Cvernovka and, ever since, it has established itself as a cultural and artistic festival of urban significance. During this festival, the tenants open their studios, inform about their activities, and prepare accompanying programmes and snacks for the visitors. There are food and beverage stalls at the courtyard, with a programme that consists mainly of concerts, discussions, and literature reading. The popularity of this event is proven by the fact that its last ‘regular’ volume in 2019 was visited by around 9,000 persons.

One important date in the story of ‘old Cvernovka’ was 16 June 2012, when the then owner of the site ordered the demolition of the oldest building of the dyeing shop from 1903 and of the boiler room from 1912. This was preceded by the termination of several lease agreements. The circumstances of the demolition caused controversy, as the owner of the site made use of the last days of validity of the inexecutable extension of the demolition permit from the period of the

former mayor of Ružinov city district – despite the fact that, at that time, a letter by the Regional Prosecutor’s Office in Bratislava was waiting on his table for two weeks, warning him about the incorrectly issued extension of the demolition permit (Ďurinda, 2014: 319).

*“We all started to think it was all over, that we would just take our stuff and move elsewhere. That Saturday, I went to the studio to grab something, and then I stayed there for the rest of the day. You have a photo as we opened port wine and were looking through the window in the corridor at the demolition of those old buildings, and you’re not sure whether you’re just watching TV or whether it’s real. The excavator stayed there for three weeks, biting that building. I felt so sick that I didn’t want to go there anymore.”* (excerpt from an interview with a tenant, Csino – Mistrík, 2014: 185).

As this quote suggests, the tenants were extremely sensitive about the demolition. It is not surprising, their working and personal environment was threatened and demolished, as many of them were temporarily even living in their studios. The public was critical as well – the demolition opened a discussion on the disappearance of industrial architecture in Bratislava, which is an important issue also in the story of Cvernovka, as it was the active involvement of ‘Cvernovka people’ in this public debate that raised public awareness about a creative community within the spaces of a former thread-making plant.

Foreign as well as Slovak practice shows<sup>15</sup> that industrial architecture offers suitable conditions for the operation of cultural and creative centres. This works thanks to their lower rent rates and economic value compared to new-built buildings or the layout of larger production halls which are suitable for organising concerts and exhibitions. After the decline of industrial production in Europe since the 1960s, many industrial buildings became vacant. At the same time, an idea emerged that culture is not reserved only for the higher social classes and that everyone has the same right for the enjoyment of culture. This led to the revision of cultural life sites and several abandoned industrial complexes began to transform into cultural plants. This rehabilitation of the industrial heritage takes place gradually from counter-culturalism through the punk movement, communes, green collective teams, and neighbourhood centres up to the current common form of cultural and creative centres (Lényi, 2014: 8). It is also a certain symbiosis, because these centres contribute to the protection (and preservation) of industrial architecture by filling it with content.

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<sup>15</sup> Foreign examples of the transformation of industrial architecture into centres of culture and art include Spinnerei in Leipzig (former cotton processing plant), Westergasfabriek in Amsterdam (formerly a gas house), or Kaapelitehdas in Helsinki (former cable manufacturing plant). In Slovakia, we can mention, for instance, Tabačka Kulturfabrik in the former tobacco plant in Košice and Refinery Gallery in Bratislava.

The problem in Slovakia is the insufficient protection of these buildings and related pressure by developers, which often leads to their demolition. Several important industrial heritage sites have been demolished in Bratislava over the past fifteen years, such as Kablo at Mlynské Nivy, Danubius Elektrik at Račianska Street, Gumon at Košická Street, or the Danubius spinning-mill site near Trnavská Road. Some of them were destroyed illegally, with Kablo and Gumon even being subject to the proceedings to declare them a national cultural heritage site at the time of the demolition (Đurinda, 2014: 316). As we have seen, even the demolition of the buildings of the old Cvernovka site took place under controversial circumstances.

Because of uncertainty and pressures by the developers, it became important for Cvernovka to inform the public of its functioning, since it had previously been a relatively closed place. As a result, a series of activities documenting the history and current cultural importance of Cvernovka took place in 2013. Exhibitions and discussions were held in the *Bavlna* (Cotton) studio under the title '*Včera predvčera*' ('Yesterday the Day before Yesterday'), accompanied by public site tours. The aim of the discussions was to substitute a dialogue between the public and state authorities on the protection of industrial heritage sites, legislation, and corruption. This event raised great media interest and support by Cvernovka sympathisers (Mistrík, 2014: 256).

In 2015, a developer became the new owner of the site, who planned the currently on-going construction of an office and residential zone, integrating the protected spinning-mill building in it. With the objective of facilitating and improving the process of negotiations with the new owner and other entities, the Cvernovka Foundation was established in December 2015 to represent the artists and creatives based at Cvernovka. The primary goal of the Cvernovka Foundation was to agree on another two years of operation at this location, even at increased rent. The foundation even considered the option of purchasing the site. When it began to be clear in spring 2016 that these scenarios would not be fulfilled and the tenants would have to leave the premises of the former thread-making factory by July, the principal objective of the Cvernovka Foundation became to preserve this community and relocate it to new premises. As the following excerpt shows, it was not only the goal of the members of the Foundation, but the decision of the majority of the tenants.

*"After attending the negotiations with the new owner and ending in failure because our ideas did not meet, we called what can be considered, in principle, the origins of the community council. We asked those people whether it made sense to stay together and whether they were interested in moving to a new place. 30 or 40 people came, and all of them unanimously said, yes, let's try to find something common, that it made sense to keep together now, otherwise it would end up by each of us going their own way, thus breaking many of these ties" (M\_1982).*

## **Moving to the current premises: The origins of Nová Cvernovka**

In a two-month process of negotiations and search for a new location, the Foundation contacted the Bratislava Self-Governing Region, which offered the premises of the former Secondary Chemical Vocational School at Račianska Street for rent. This school was founded in 1951 in the buildings designed by architect Vladimír Karfík. The school site was falling into disrepair since 2008. Ever since, the Bratislava Self-governing Region tried to sell it several times, but with no success.

The lease of this site is for 25 years with the condition of setting up a cultural and creative centre from the tenants' own resources. The contract includes an annual rent of the site, which is currently paid by the Foundation by means of investment rent, i.e. investments in the building and the surrounding area. The first step in moving there was the cleaning of the school premises, which was carried out with the help of homeless people. The cleaning of the school and the removal of the furniture began in September 2016. These works had primarily the form of community activities organised by the Cvernovka Foundation. The architectonic and engineering studios run as part of the cultural and creative centre played an important role in restoring the site, sharing the common spaces and tasks as a manifestation of certain self-sufficiency in the process of reconstruction. In November 2016, building companies began to restore the interior of the building, and the tenants could launch the adjustments of their studios in April 2017. The Foundation also aimed to financially cover the reconstruction of the infrastructure and shared premises, however, the final investments and studio adjustments were the responsibility of the tenants themselves, which was an important step towards handling the financial burden of the reconstruction.

## **The development and present of Nová Cvernovka**

At present, the cultural and creative centre has over 120 studios and facilities with around 450 people working there. The first floor of Nová Cvernovka is open to all visitors. There are public facilities – shops,<sup>16</sup> a bakery, a café, a canteen called Twelve souls (Dvanásť duší) and a public library called the Cabinet of Slowness (Kabinet pomalosti). There is also a concert hall with a bar for holding public events. The upper floors of the building are more closed, housing the tenants' premises. Coworking Cvernovka is on the fifth floor, offering not only working infrastructure, but also a small café and a kindergarten for the children of the people who work there.

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<sup>16</sup> For example, a shop selling art products called ArtAttack shop and the showroom of children's clothing brand called Mile.

The entire site is managed by the Cvernovka Foundation. It pursues the values of freedom, responsibility, diversity, openness, and sustainability. The main declared goals of the Foundation is the search for innovative models of cooperation between the non-profit and public sectors, and the breathing of new life into forgotten places by their transformation into centres of culture and creativity with elements of social engagement and green sustainability. The long-term vision of the organisation is to increase trust in society (Cvernovka Foundation, 2018: 5). These facts are also reflected in the public programme of Nová Cvernovka, which seeks to be engaged, innovative, as well as educative. The programme also includes as an important part the organisation and hosting of festivals: music festival Sharp, literary festival Autoriáda, ecological festival Nasuti, and the multi-genre urban festival May 1 – Open Studios Day. The educational dimension is represented, among other things, by making the entrance area of the school building a clearly visible intervention space with specific exhibition activities that respond to important social events (e.g. 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of August 1968, 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Slovakia's entry in the European Union, or the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Velvet Revolution of November 1989)<sup>17</sup> (ibid: 22).

In addition to the school building, the Nová Cvernovka complex also includes a former student' dormitory building next door. While the studios of artists and creatives can be found mainly in the school building, the dormitory building serves mainly for innovations and civic activism, including rental housing for homeless people under the *Housing Cverna* project covered by Vagus civic association. The dormitory building also includes a former gym which is currently used by dancers and performers who do not dispose of their own spatial background. Thanks to the collaboration of the Cvernovka Foundation, the Platform for Contemporary Dance and the Bratislava Self-Governing Region, this space will turn into a centre of dance, performing and visual arts in the future (Sidorová et al., 2020: 108).

Around the buildings of the former school and dormitory, there is a large plot of land a part of which already serves as a park with a children's playground and outdoor seating. The common name of this space is Park de Palma – after the abandoned site of the former Palma plant in the vicinity. This space is used for outdoor events mainly in the spring and summer period, such as concerts, film screening, discussions, and grill parties. For the purposes of preparing an architectonic and landscaping study 'New Park in the New Town – Conversion of a part of the school area into a public part in Nová Cvernovka', participatory planning of the future use of the area took place at the turn of the years 2018 – 2019, involving the public and tenants by means of participatory meetings and a questionnaire survey. In 2019, the architectonic and landscaping study of the

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<sup>17</sup> I shall return to the educational activities of Nová Cvernovka in the sub-chapter "*Educating the public and awareness-raising*" on page 66.

future form of the public park was published, reflecting the outcomes of the participatory planning as well. The study envisages the creation of a public, semi-public and private part of the complex, and aims to open up the complex towards Račianska Street by removing the wall with fencing, and to build a cycle path instead of the current pedestrian walkway, which will be transferred to the park itself. The new park will include revitalised greenery and furniture, temporary and permanent art installations, terraces adjacent to gastronomic functions, an extended children's playground, a stage, a sauna, and a summer kitchen (Lényi et al., 2019). At the time of writing these lines in December 2020, a crowdfunding campaign "*Rubble for Park*" (*'Suť na park'*) is underway with the aim to collect funds for the sorting and transformation of rubble<sup>18</sup> into building material to be used in the reconstruction of the park within the Cvernovka complex. This crowdfunding campaign explains the transformation process and refers to the values of environmental responsibility, revitalisation, and innovativeness, which are often present in the activities of the Cvernovka Foundation.

The outer area of Cvernovka was an important place for its programme in summer 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic. The first phase of the pandemic brought measures prohibiting the holding of public events in Slovakia, which had a major negative impact also on the culture and art sector and, hence, on the activities of Nová Cvernovka. The annual popular urban festival MAY 1 – Open Studios Days was held online in the form of a moderated programme and short videos about the tenants and the centre's functioning. The 'Cvernovka people' used the closing of the centre for enhancing and adjusting the surrounding area. The pandemic situation in Slovakia improved during summer, bringing a relaxation of the measures. This also meant the launch of Nová Cvernovka's public programme, which was held mainly outdoors. The subsequent deterioration of the situation in autumn made it impossible again to organise public programmes. Many of the planned events had to be cancelled or were held online, such as the annual Nasuti Festival or an expert conference on the management of culture 'Anténa Conference'.

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<sup>18</sup> Rubble is mixed building waste that consists mainly of concrete, bricks, plaster, and ceramics. During the reconstruction of Nová Cvernovka premises, a large amount of rubble was produced, which is now stored at the Cvernovka complex and, in addition to being converted into building material, it is also used in various art installations. This rubble is also referred to by the Nasuti Festival which deals with ecology and environmental sustainability issues.

## Chapter 5:

### TYPES OF CIVIC ACTIVISM IN THE STORY OF CVERNOVKA

In Chapter 2 of the book, we have learnt about the specificities of civic activism and urban social movements in the Central and Eastern European region. Many of them can be regarded as (more or less direct) consequences of the socialist past, though the impacts of the current trend are gradually growing. These include, for instance, the globalisation process, the development of communication technology, or the increasingly important environmental and ecological issues. In this part of the book, I shall explore how this theoretical knowledge is manifested in the activities of Nová Cvernovka. During my field research, I was able to observe the wide-ranging activities of Nová Cvernovka in the field of civic activism. This chapter describes these manifestations and classifies them into five basic categories. These categories are presented and analysed in the context of the theoretical works on the development of urban movements and civic activism in Central and Eastern European countries. The creation of these five groups resulted directly from my field research and subsequent categorisation of the specific examples of civic activism based on the similarity of their goals, thematic focus, or action repertoire. This categorisation enables an analytical understanding of the specific examples of civic activism, where their mutual relationship and the relationship to the overall development of Cvernovka are also important and cannot be analysed separately.

#### **Public mobilisation by Cvernovka**

I call one of the types of Cvernovka's civic activism public mobilisation, as the direct actors of these manifestations of civic activism are not only Cvernovka and the people working there, but primarily the public which responds to Cvernovka's activities and the events that are directly related to its story. With respect to this type of activism, Cvernovka serves as an impetus for the emergence of civic activism. There are two basic types of such activism. The first one includes manifestations that 'naturally' and organically respond to specific events related to the development of Cvernovka – e.g. civic initiatives pursuing the preservation of the original Cvernovka complex or disagreement with the demolition of some

of its buildings in 2012. The second type refers to conscious and targeted efforts of the Cvernovka Foundation to obtain public support which we have observed mainly with respect to crowdfunding campaigns organised by the Cvernovka Foundation and in the participatory planning of the future functions of the dormitory building and the nearby park. However, the boundaries between these two types are not fixed. There is another emerging type of the manifestation of mobilisation – a wave of support and public participation during the period of negotiations on partnership with the Bratislava Self-Governing Region, with the subsequent relocation to the new premises and reconstruction of the Nová Cvernovka complex. Even though these initiatives reacted to the events of the story of Cvernovka, they arose also thanks to the targeted effort of the Cvernovka Foundation in informing citizens and gaining supporters for this cultural and creative centre. Let us have a closer look at the said manifestations of mobilisation.

The above-mentioned uncertain period of the old Cvernovka, which began primarily with the demolition of some buildings in 2012, provoked a wave of civic initiatives and public reactions. Initially, they mainly concerned the efforts to ensure the protection of the old Cvernovka complex and disagreement with the demolition by the developer. One example is the initiative of the Technical Heritage Club, which filed a complaint to the Heritage Protection Office, supported with expert opinions. These identified new facts in the form of historical and symbolic values that needed to be identified to open proceedings with the aim to declare buildings as heritage sites. The activity of the Technical Heritage Club included the writing of letters to the competent authorities and the publishing of press releases in favour of the protection of Cvernovka. This pressure was supported by the then Chief Architect of the City of Bratislava, Ingrid Konrad, who spoke about the need to protect the objects as a whole.<sup>19</sup> The activities of the public took place also online, mainly in the form of writing blogs and articles and by joining online discussions.

While the initial phases were characterised by an immediate reaction of individuals to situations and events related to Cvernovka, at a later stage it was a targeted effort by some active tenants and later by the Cvernovka Foundation to inform and mobilise the public. This happened mainly since 2014. It was a period of negotiations with the then owner of the complex, when there was a threat that this community would have to leave the site. The raising of public awareness took place mainly by means of articles published in newspapers and on the internet, and the annual Open Studios Days on May 1, the exhibition *Yesterday the Day before Yesterday: Cvernovka and its Stories*, and the subsequent expert popularisation book *Cvernovka* were also an important tool for informing about Cvernovka. The book was published in 2015, raising great public interest,

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<sup>19</sup> Source: <https://www.startitup.sk/pribeh-cvernovky-byvalej-tovarne-z-ktorej-sa-stalo-kulturne-centrum-bratislavy/> [22/02/2021]

as evidenced by the fact that it was sold out in the course of around ten months. The common thematic denominator of these inputs was not only the story of Cvernovka itself, but also the wider issue of the protection of industrial architecture, pressure by developers, and inactivity by the competent authorities. One respondent accurately called this kind of public mobilisation by Cvernovka as 'PR in the bud':

*"... that work, it was like PR in the bud, as I would call it. Last but not least, there was an exhibition about Cvernovka with a big happening, film screening, a trailer, discussions. And the book afterwards. We started to spread it in the public space. Because the narrative was about industrial heritage, industrial architecture. A kind of a civic attitude, being in the zone where we saw with our own eyes, through the windows, the demolition of Kablovka, the demolition of Gumovka. We saw the peak form of that wild capitalism, we saw the town, the local authorities and the public sector being completely detached from reality and leaving those private players do whatever they wished to do. This was the beginning of the activism that is, let's say, more developed or more mature today" (M\_1977).*

The public support achieved in this way played an important role in the negotiations with the Bratislava Self-Governing Region, as well. By swinging the public opinion over to its side, the Cvernovka Foundation sought to strengthen its position during these negotiations, as evidenced by the following respondent's statement:

*"The public plays a very important role there; in the same way as it is playing now, the public was an important moment for us also at the beginning. And especially during the negotiations with Bratislava Self-Governing Region, we were trying to get some letters of support and, overall, we sought to give the impression that the public opinion is on our side" (M\_1982).*

The efforts of the Cvernovka Foundation were successful at the end, reaching an agreement with the Bratislava Self-Governing Region. As a result, the 'old Cvernovka' community moved to Račianska Street and the abandoned school complex was reconstructed. In addition to demonstrative support, direct involvement of the tenants and supporters in voluntary and community work and activities organised by the Cvernovka Foundation was also present.

*"It were mostly friends that helped with the moving, however, during the reconstruction, we had big voluntary team works, different people, volunteers. There was big help by companies, volunteers. Dozens of people, big voluntary team works. We had to set up a team of people who had gloves, tools, and there had to be someone to prepare food" (M\_1980).*

During that period, public support translated also into crowdfunding, which became an indispensable way of obtaining finance (not only) during the period of relocation and reconstruction of the former Secondary Chemical Vocational School site. The first of the two large-scale crowdfunding campaigns of the Cvernovka Foundation related to the relocation and reconstruction took place under the title #WEAREMOVING in summer 2016. It was based on informing the public by means of news articles and interviews with the Cvernovka actors, Facebook campaigns and by contacting people and companies through Cvernovka's e-mail database, containing around 2,700 contacts at that time. Through this online campaign, the Foundation finally raised 16,764 euros from 557 donors.<sup>20</sup> Crowdfunding was also used in the raising of funds for the lighting, sound, and dimming equipment for the concert hall of Nová Cvernovka. The campaign run under the name *Light and Sound for Live Culture in Nová Cvernovka* in autumn 2017 was successful, raising 30,000 euros. We should also mention the ongoing campaign '*Rubble for the Park*', aimed to obtain building material and reconstruction of the public park within the Cvernovka complex.<sup>21</sup>

One example of mobilisation are participatory processes organised by the Cvernovka Foundation with the aim to engage the public and the inhabitants living nearby into decision-making processes. This activity is manifested, among other things, through the basic audit of civic amenities and survey of the surroundings with a radius of around 500 metres from Nová Cvernovka, which were carried out in April and May 2017. They aimed to map the existing services and define the potential functions of the dormitory building. The audit included (1) an analysis of existing services and background of the surroundings; (2) interviews with the residents of the adjacent neighbourhoods; (3) outputs from the joint participatory meeting with the residents of the surrounding area and with the representatives of two local civic associations; (4) results of the internal questionnaire survey among the then users of Nová Cvernovka premises, and (5) public discussion as part of the Open Studios Day, held on May 1, 2017. Another example of engaging the public in the decision-making process on the future form of the Nová Cvernovka complex was the above-mentioned participatory planning of the future use of the intended park, which took place at the turn of the years 2018 and 2019 by means of participatory meetings and a questionnaire survey.

An important element of these activities was to inform the public and raise awareness with the aim to gain the support of the residents for Cvernovka and

<sup>20</sup> Source: Presentation Campaign '*We Are Moving*' – *Cvernovka Foundation* (Suchová – Štasselová, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> By February 2021, at the time of writing this text, 32,750 euros had been raised of the necessary amount of 40,000 euros under the crowdfunding campaign '*Rubble for the Park*'. For more details see: <https://www.sutnapark.sk/> [17/02/2021]

to raise interest in them as well as the feeling of belonging to this centre, which is a prerequisite for the effectiveness of such mobilisation. This intention was often conscious and targeted, though in some cases it resulted automatically from the events reflected by the public, in particular the demolition of some buildings of the former thread-making factory in 2012. This happened during the period when several industrial heritage sites were demolished in Bratislava, some of them illegally, and the public perceived this issue sensitively. Hence, the narratives of informing the public concerned not only Cvernovka as such and the uncertainty when it comes to its further functioning, but also referred to the protection of industrial architecture, developers' arrogance, and insufficient activities of the competent authorities. According to Jacobsson (2015a), this type of urban mobilisation from the grassroots is frequent in the Central and Eastern European region and, in a broader sense, it relates to the mobilisation of the population against privatisation and commodification of the public space or for the protection of cultural heritage, with architects or artists often involved in them. Císar (2013b: 143) calls a similar type of civic activism civic self-organisation, considering it to be one of the most widespread types of civic activism in Central and Eastern Europe. It is a collective action mobilised without involving a formal organisation. Hence, it is disputable to regard some of these examples of mobilisation as this type of activism, because, after the establishment of the Cvernovka Foundation at the end of 2015, the public was mobilised also by means of a formal organisation, even though citizen involvement in specific forms of participation was still rather on a spontaneous and voluntary basis.

These manifestations of mobilisation are also related to public space issues and the dilemma of who owns the urban premises and who has the right to make decisions in this field. According to Jacobsson, issues concerning pressure by private investors and developers are often reflected in civic activism in the region. This relates to the process of restructuring of cities after the fall of socialism, which involves the transfer of resources from the public to the private sector and decentralisation of political responsibility at the local level. As a result, we often see the public space from a black-and-white perspective, considering it 'good', while perceiving the private space as 'bad and negative'. This dichotomy is also present in the reactions to the demolition of industrial heritage sites in Slovakia. Nevertheless, public space cannot be defined based on ownership rights and availability, as they do not directly predict how the given space is used. In addition, the diverse space of the city cannot be limited to two strict regimes – available and unavailable. Hence, further questions arise from the discussion on the public space: for whom, when, and under what conditions the space is available (Nawratek, 2012: 21).

As we can see through the example of Cvernovka, an important strategy of the actors is to attract media attention which, according to Jacobsson (2015a), is used by activists within the region as a compensation for ineffective lobbying

due to the passive attitude of public or local authorities. This type of mobilisation related to urban issues, including an uncertain future and demolition of a precious building, can be interpreted as an effective way of achieving goals in post-socialist societies where issues related to public policy often have negative connotations and raise suspicions and mistrust among the inhabitants (Jacobsson – Korolczuk, 2019).

The growth in informal activism at the local level is a sign of the strengthening of civil society and weakening of the socialist heritage. The citizens of post-socialist cities are more and more open to participating in various civil activities, such as volunteering, involvement in financial collections, blogging, and contributing to online discussions (Bitušíková, 2015b: 127). These activities were also present among the Cvernovka supporters at the time of demolition of its former premises and moving to the current place. They are relatively 'invisible' manifestations without a formal membership in organisations, being hardly measurable by quantitative methods and often beyond the sight of social scientists in the past.

Many of these mobilisations are reactive and refer to the public space of cities or daily phenomena and problems of living in an urban environment. The reflecting on these topics often leads to a wider politicisation of issues and generalisation of demands. The shared experience of daily life thus provides a basis for solidarity and collective action by citizens with little experience in the creation of political demands (Jacobsson, 2015a). We have seen it in the case of Cvernovka, where disagreement with the demolition of a part of the original complex grew gradually into a wider issue of the protection and preservation of industrial heritage sites. In this case, however, it was not an automatic process; an important role was played by the activities of the people from Cvernovka and media coverage. Thanks to this, Cvernovka gained many supporters and sympathisers, which formed the basis for its successful crowdfunding campaigns. According to Jacobsson (ibid.), it is the feeling of belonging and collectively shared cultural and spatial relationship to the city that represent the first step towards the building of general trust in the region, having the potential to motivate common citizens towards civic activism.

### **Cooperation with other entities in the raising of awareness about the functioning of cultural and creative centres: 'Trust-building'**

Civil society cannot be understood as a set of individual actors pursuing their goals on an individual basis and separately from others. It is a complex network of relationships that can contribute to the effectiveness of the activities of both individuals and organisations. I shall look at these processes more thoroughly along with the analysis of transactional activism which has a broad spectrum of manifestations in Nová Cvernovka. The second identified type of civic activism

includes those which focus on trust-building and the raising of awareness about the sphere of cultural and creative centres and independent culture. In this category, I include cooperation with local and regional authorities (in particular, the Bratislava Self-Governing Region and Trnava Self-Governing Region) and the creation of social networks with cultural and creative centres with a similar focus.

In the case of local and regional authorities, it is mainly the efforts to build on the experience and knowledge of the Cvernovka Foundation in the process of facilitation and improvement of the legislative conditions of cooperation between civic initiatives and local and regional authorities in the transformation of unused buildings into similar cultural and creative centres. When defining this type of civic activism, I also apply the term 'trust-building', which often appeared in the interviews when discussing this topic. This expression refers to the fact that the form of cooperation similar to the one between the Cvernovka Foundation and the Bratislava Self-Governing Region is still new under in the Slovak context. However, the story of Cvernovka suggests that partnership between local or regional authorities and the non-profit sector can be an effective method of running cultural and creative centres in unused buildings owned by local or regional authorities. Since it is a less widespread model, Slovakia still lacks a uniform legislation determining the form and conditions of such joint projects. The specific examples from practice are thus based on mutual trust and complicated adaptation to the relevant legislation on both sides. As the words by two respondents suggest, the absence of mutual trust between self-governments and the non-profit sector stems mainly from the lack of information and poorer awareness about similar projects among many local and regional politicians and officials at the level of self-governments.

*“One of those principal slogans that we often discuss is trust-building. Because also the case of cooperation between the regional authorities and a non-profit organisation on this issue is unprecedented in a certain sense and is about trust. For when it fails on one side or the other, it will again be a negative example. And anyone else will be afraid of entering such cooperation in the future. On the other hand, if it succeeds and it works well for many years, it can be inspiring” (M\_1981).*

*“To implement a cultural centre project or a cultural project, you need to do lot of awareness-raising activities also at the level of local authorities. There is a lack of trust in such projects and many people in the leadership or the deputies themselves are reluctant about initiatives which offer a specific form of cooperation to the self-government. They don't understand the functioning of this sector, now I'm talking about cultural, visual art, and other similar things. So, there is a need for greater awareness. And whether a particular project succeeds depends on the mental capacity and mindset of the given local authority. But this is not so good because, in my*

*opinion, these processes should be set in a systematic way. I mean giving systemic support for initiatives or cultural projects.” (M\_1982).*

The initial impulse for this type of civic activism is the cooperation between the Cvernovka Foundation and the Bratislava Self-Governing Region, which was officially launched in May 2016 by the bilateral signing of the *Memorandum of Mutual Cooperation*. The initial aim of this cooperation was to create and run a cultural and creative centre within the complex owned by the Bratislava Self-Governing Region. However, the cooperation takes place also at other levels, for example, in the preparation of educational activities for the students of regional secondary schools, which I shall tackle later.

Another important example of this kind of activism is the cooperation between the Cvernovka Foundation and the Trnava Self-Governing Region in preparing a manual on the use of abandoned public buildings with the aim to increase the effectiveness of the public administration’s work and in the creation of the Arta cultural and creative centre in Piešťany. This centre is planned to be run in the building of the former confectionery factory Figaro, drawing also on the experience of the Cvernovka Foundation. In June 2020, the deputies of the Trnava Self-Governing Region finally approved the lease of the buildings and of the surrounding area in order to set up the cultural and creative centre exercising the functions of a cultural space, including a shop with local design, a café, co-working spaces, studios, and a zero-waste zone (Sidorová et al., 2020: 138–139).

The manual on the use abandoned public buildings was published in the form of a book entitled *Nepredať! Zveľadiť! (Don’t Sell! Develop!)* (Sidorová et al., 2020), which responds to the fact that local or regional authorities own many abandoned buildings the sale of which failed, and are therefore unused and fall into disrepair. The aim of the manual is to simplify the related legislative processes and the funding of such projects and to make them more effective, as well as to become an inspiration for future initiatives in the field of architectonic, constructional, and environmental interventions or in the creation of the programme itself. By doing so, the Cvernovka Foundation not only hands over its own know-how in this field but, in concurrence with the Trnava Self-Governing Region, carries out survey mapping of the experience of the actors of other similar initiatives in Slovakia.

*“The output should be a structured book describing a certain methodology, the processes of how to proceed in... I don’t know how to say it in Slovak, re-purposing, when you are looking for a new purpose for neglected, abandoned buildings. And this publication should serve not only for the local authorities, for the assets management departments, but also for the very initiatives or for anyone having an idea and wishing to offer a project to the local authority with the aim of implementing it in some building” (M\_1982).*

The described type of civic activism refers not only to direct cooperation with public sphere entities, but also to networking with other cultural and creative centres of similar focus. Its most significant manifestation is *Antenna – Network for Independent Culture*, of which Nová Cvernovka is a member. This initiative aims to improve the position of independent art and culture in society, advocate the interests of its members against state and public authorities, act as an expert partner for the Ministry of Culture of the SR and the Slovak Arts Council, and promote cooperation among its members. The Antenna's activities also include the organisation of expert conferences, public forums, and training activities, as well as the promotion of independent art and the distribution of art productions.<sup>22</sup>

Nová Cvernovka establishes contacts also internationally, being a member of the *Trans Europe Halls* cultural network. The main goal of this network is to transform abandoned buildings into centres of art, culture, and civic activism, and to create projects and synergies between such centres at the European level. The meetings of *Trans Europe Halls* are held twice a year. In 2019, the meeting was organised in Timisoara, Romania, and was attended, among others, by two members of the Cvernovka Foundation. After the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the planned events of *Trans Europe Halls* were moved to a later date. Special mention should be made of the international conference on cultural and creative spaces in Europe, to be held in June 2021.

The examples described in the previous paragraphs can be qualified as transactional activism based on various kinds of cooperation between actors. This type of participation is typical of the activities of Cvernovka and is visible also in the field of education or the organisation of public events. Since transactional activism is discussed in the next book chapter, I shall provide a deeper analysis of the manifestations of trust-building. The described category is only a small segment of the broad spectrum of cooperation projects of the Cvernovka Foundation, and includes only the activities which target the state and the functioning of the cultural and creative centres in Slovakia. This area is closely linked to the term 'trust-building' that we have already mentioned several times. This expression refers to the need of overcoming mutual mistrust between citizens, politicians, and the public authorities, being one of the consequences of socialism. The reasons for such mistrust relate, among other things, to the long-lasting gap between the private and the institutional sphere, controlled by the state during the socialist period. Citizens were isolated from the decisions that affected them and, even after the fall of socialism, this mistrust in the ability and willingness of public authorities in the process of addressing their problems persists. There is also a reluctance to take collective actions, resulting in the preference for individual strategies and, last but not least, the lack of

<sup>22</sup> Source: Statutes of the civic organisation *Anténa – sieť pre nezávislú kultúru* (*Antenna – Network for Independent Culture*).

transparency of local and regional authorities, as seen in the decision-making on the development of cities (Jacobsson, 2015b: 15).

In the case of cultural and creative centres, the reason for mistrust and a reluctant attitude by local and regional authorities is also the lack of information about the functioning of independent culture in Slovakia. Inasmuch this form of cooperation between local and regional authorities and the non-profit sector is not clearly defined, its success depends on the willingness of both sides to listen and seek compromises. The fact that Nová Cvernovka is subject to three levels of territorial self-government – Bratislava – Nové Mesto City District, Municipal Office of the Capital City Bratislava, and the Bratislava Self-Governing Region – is also a challenge in this respect.

*“The only thing that hinders us is the complicated nature of the fact that we’re discussing the development of Bratislava as such and, at the end of the day, we don’t care about whether we talk with the city district, the city, or with the self-government. It is a formal thing for us. We would like to remove the barriers that are often caused by the competences at the different levels. For sometimes it is hard to find a dividing line between something being beneficial for the city or for the city district. Simply said, this is Bratislava, you know what I mean” (M\_1982).*

As this respondent’s statement suggests, cooperation at all three levels (or two levels in the case of smaller towns) is needed for a successful and effective functioning of such centres. This, however, brings many complications, which relates to the different competences of the individual territorial self-government entities or factors of poor trust and information. Especially after the elections (or change of the management of certain self-governments), the key to establishing cooperation is to present in a trustworthy manner the goals and the way of functioning of the cultural and creative centre. This, however, may considerably decelerate well-established processes as well as common projects carried out with the previous management of a given local or regional authority.

### **Reflecting on the current social and political events**

On February 2018, Slovakia was shaken by the news about the murder of the young investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová. This event was an impetus for the creation of the citizens’ movement For a Decent Slovakia (Za slušné Slovensko). The protest gatherings organised by this movement lured tens of thousands of people out into the streets of Slovakia and resulted in political and social changes. The murders and the subsequent period had a great impact also on the activities of Nová Cvernovka, as civic activism and the reflecting on current political and social issues became one of the principal

goals of the Cvernovka Foundation. This gave rise to numerous initiatives which can be classified as the third type of civic activism – responding to current social and political events, which happens mainly in the form of participation in protests and the creation or support for public declarations and petitions, usually taking place within the online environment.

*“At that time (during the period after the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová – note by the author), it went in the direction that the Foundation said yes, these are the topics that we want to address, and we’re always ready in this respect. It is therefore important for us that the Foundation is a stable institution, financially stable for the future, and can thus suddenly become a shelter or support to all these things in such extreme moments” (M\_1981).*

The initiation and involvement in the activities associated with this murder are the best example of the described type of civic activism. During the first days after this tragic event, a group of six to ten people was set up, meeting and discussing possible reactions to the current situation on a daily basis, even to the detriment of their duties. One of the outcomes of these days was the drafting of the *Declaration of independent cultural centres, cultural and educational institutions, and citizens’ communities in Slovakia*,<sup>23</sup> published on March 2, 2018, which, among other things, criticised the functioning of the state authorities and of the top state representatives, as well as the long-lasting inactivity and weak civic engagement of society. Up to 308 cultural and educational institutions and civic initiatives gradually signed this declaration, including some universities, university departments, theatres, galleries, and book publishers.

Another activity of the people from Nová Cvernovka was the initiative *With Their Blood (Ich krvou)*. It was initially a graphical label with this inscription, disseminated via Facebook, which people could pin to their profile picture. Eventually, the competent people decided to also produce badges which they distributed at the Concert for Ján and Martina at Bratislava’s Main Square on March 4, 2018. The atmosphere of this period in Nová Cvernovka is described in the following respondents’ statements:

*“Reading about it and having a meeting, we were asking ourselves, in what kind of a country are we living? It almost made us move abroad. At that time, I think it was a couple of days later, the silent protest or the silent march was organised. Certainly, half of Cvernovka people attended it, and I think that, as a community, we were very emotional about it. I remember the meetings in our event spaces, when people were embarrassed about those events, and we were discussing about how to take a stance.*

<sup>23</sup> The full text of the declaration with a full list of the signatories is available (in Slovak language) at: [https://novacvernovka.eu/vyhlasenie \[22/02/2021\]](https://novacvernovka.eu/vyhlasenie [22/02/2021]).

*Already at that time, we felt that we as Cvernovka or the community around us had a certain impact. And many people in Cvernovka claim a very strong civic, engaged principle of functioning. We joined our forces with the guys from the Decent Slovakia quite quickly, well, it was not yet For a Decent Slovakia, it was the Anti-Corruption March at that time. And there was quite intensive communication between these people and us, also at the ideological level, and so Nová Cvernovka or the Cvernovka Foundation was active also in connection with public speeches during the protests” (M\_1982).*

*“...around six, later up to ten people started to meet regularly. This was during the first few days; later, we met every day and were discussing the things very intensively. We had an initiative, *With Their Blood*, which appealed to a lot of people, they thought it was too harsh. And around a week later the movement *For a Decent Slovakia* launched its activities, and we provided our support for them, wanting to avoid two parallel initiatives. It was intensive indeed, we suddenly put aside all other things, including our work or the work of the Foundation. People from the Foundation, as well as designers, artists, who normally have their common duties. All of them suddenly stopped doing other things and dedicated all their efforts to this initiative” (M\_1981).*

The initiative *With Their Blood* turned into a support action for public gatherings organised by students and young people. The first of them, the commemorative event with a march to Námestie slobody in Bratislava (mentioned by the respondent from the first excerpt) was held on March 2, 2018, under the name *We Don't Want the '90s Back!* The next gatherings were protest events and gradually grew into the civic initiative called *For a Decent Slovakia*. In addition to participation, the support activities of Nová Cvernovka included communication with the organisers, assistance in the organisation and production of the first gatherings, production of banners with a single design, and delivery of a speech at the protest in Bratislava on March 16, 2018, formulated by the Cvernovka Foundation.

Nová Cvernovka is active also when it comes to giving statements on the state of culture in Slovakia and activities of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic. The centre's manager, the Cvernovka Foundation, is one of the signatories of the civic platform *We Stand by Culture*. This initiative, founded by the students of the Academy of Fine Arts, criticised the functioning of the Ministry of Culture and demanded the change of its management, including via online petition which was signed by over 9,000 citizens.<sup>24</sup> The initiative *We Stand*

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<sup>24</sup> The petition for dismissing the Minister of Culture Ľubica Laššáková for interfering in expert processes and for her incompetence, available ((in Slovak language) at: [https://www.peticie.com/peticia\\_za\\_odvolanie\\_mnisterky\\_kultury\\_laakovej\\_pre\\_zasahovanie\\_do\\_odbornych\\_procesov\\_a\\_nekompetentnos](https://www.peticie.com/peticia_za_odvolanie_mnisterky_kultury_laakovej_pre_zasahovanie_do_odbornych_procesov_a_nekompetentnos) [22/02/2021]).

by *Culture* was critical about several cases that formed the content of the open letter addressed to the then Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini. The delivery of the letter on June 26, 2019, was accompanied by a public gathering, attended also by several people from Nová Cvernovka. This student initiative was awarded the prize Cultural Event of the Year in 2019 by a Slovak daily newspaper on the voting of people from the cultural and artistic circles. The activities of this initiative have continued even after the parliamentary elections in 2020. During the pandemic, it organised an all-Slovak survey on the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on culture.

Ecology and environmental sustainability as well as climate change issues are other important civic activism issues in Nová Cvernovka. One example of the described type of civic activism of the Cvernovka Foundation is the support for the call of the expert and cultural community addressed to the Government of the Slovak Republic, the media, and the public on the climate crisis in December 2018, called *Let's Not Waste Time*. Among its signatories were several people from Nová Cvernovka. Individuals from this cultural and creative centre were actively involved in the formulation of this initiative. Cvernovka also supported the climate strike, held in September 2019. On the eve of this event, the 'Painting of banners before the climate strike' took place in Nová Cvernovka.

We should also mention the organisation of events and exhibitions in Nová Cvernovka on the anniversaries of important events, in particular the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the invasion of the Warsaw Pact Troops in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in 1989. However, these undertakings were not a critical response to the current political and social events and problems, but were rather educative in nature, and I therefore include them in the following type of civic activism in the framework of Cvernovka's activities.

Public gatherings responding to the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová can be classified as episodic mass mobilisations, as understood by Czech sociologist Císař. In our region, they refer to quite rare, short-term protest events with a large number of participants, which are originally not organised by formal organisations (Císař, 2013c: 143). The gatherings in Slovakia were initially organised bottom-up by students and young people who gradually formed the civic initiative called *For a Decent Slovakia*. This initiative is defined as an "informal network of active citizens from all regions of Slovakia and some foreign cities, who were brought together by the unnecessary murder of journalist Ján Kuciak and archaeologist Martina Kušnírová".<sup>25</sup>

The argument about the short-term nature of episodic mass mobilisations, as put by Císař, is not fully applicable in this case. Even in November 2019 (i.e. 21 months after the murder), a public gathering *For a Decent Slovakia* was held, though with considerably smaller attendance compared to the initial events at the

<sup>25</sup> Source: <https://zaslusneslovensko.sk/o-co-nam-ide/> [22/02/2021].

turn of the winter and spring 2018, which attracted tens of thousands of people to Slovak squares. The long-term character of these protests can be explained primarily by the fact that even though they constantly refer to the tragic murder, they thematically respond to new events and issues related to the current political situation in the country and the process of investigation of this act which again and again mobilise citizens to attend these demonstrations.

Nevertheless, similar long-term mass demonstrations are relatively rare in the region and usually appear as a reaction to extremely serious events, as was the case with the double murder. Petitions represent a more frequent form of protest mobilisation. In this regard, most activists prefer using the term 'initiative' instead of 'movement' or 'organisation' (Bitušiková, 2018: 17). The above-mentioned declaration by independent cultural centres after the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová can also be considered a petition initiative, just like the civic platforms *We Stand by Culture* and *Let's Not Waste Time*. These initiatives display signs of transactional activism, because upon their emergence (and in the list of signatories) they bring together not only individuals, but institutions and civic associations as well. The involvement of culture and educational institutions and civic initiatives in these calls is an example of establishing contacts and cooperation which, in addition, enhances the legitimacy and weight of the demands of these petitions.

## **Educating the public and awareness-raising**

Educational activities and awareness-raising, running at two main levels, are an important aspect of the civic activism in Nová Cvernovka. The first one includes educational activities carried out (or co-organised) by the Cvernovka Foundation itself, as education and awareness-raising among the broad public is one of the basic purposes of its activities. The second level comprises educational activities created by initiatives and the studios located in Nová Cvernovka.

The exhibitions installed at the entry area of the complex, dedicated to current topics or anniversaries of significant events, are an important element of the Foundation's educational activities. These are not only art exhibitions, but emphasis is also placed on education, the provision of information as well as a critical view of different issues. The aspect of activism and education based on art and culture is typical of Nová Cvernovka, and this concept forms the pillar of these exhibitions:

*"My ambition is to set up a programme so that this aspect of entertainment is always a driving force for criticism and education. This is my basic formula for how to set up the programme in my opinion. I will give you a couple of concrete examples. We have a lobby, an entrance hall which, we thought a year ago (in 2018 – note by*

the author), *could serve for large thematic exhibitions of one, two, or three months, presenting a critical view of big issues. We don't call it a gallery on purpose; we call it an intervention space, because Nová Cvernovka is visited by hundreds of people daily, all of them passing through this space. If I were to vulgarise it, if there is techno music in that hall, those 20- or 25-year-old people, even drunken, spend some time there. It really works well; I have even made pictures of it several times, of a drunken person reading Šimečka's text on the non-freedom of socialism at one o'clock at night"* (M\_1977).

The exhibitions have so far presented the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia in 1968 (exhibition called *Occupation 1968*); the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Slovakia's entry in the European Union (exhibition *Brussels's Dyclate*) and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the November 1989 events (exhibition *Iron, Velvet, Scissors*). At the time of writing this text in November 2020, the exhibition *CHOICE 2050* is taking place there, reflecting on the uncertain future of our planet as a result of the climate crisis. These exhibitions are accompanied by lectures, discussions, and workshops. Apart from the visitors of the centre, secondary school students are another target group of these educational activities. This happens in the framework of a separate project by the Foundation and the Bratislava Self-Governing Region as the founder of secondary schools. Workshops for students consist of model situations and roll plays and are co-organised by the Edudrama civic association, based in Nová Cvernovka, as well as others.

*"The educational aspect is quite present in the programme, which focuses on pupils and young people. We want to educate them through exhibitions, lectures, and discussions. Either on our own, or in cooperation with some partners. Our cooperation with the BSG (Bratislava Self-Governing Region – note by the author) proved to be very good, as their public policies include care for secondary schools. We have already tried several programme elements through which we linked secondary schools under the BSG to our contents. This has proven to work well. For instance, we have had many discussions on the European Union and on civil society as such. We want to address these topics, mainly with respect to young people, and raise awareness"* (M\_1982).

The overall programme organised within the premises of Nová Cvernovka reflects also on the aspects of education, information, and awareness-raising. These events are organised either individually by the Cvernovka Foundation, or in cooperation with other initiatives or institutions. The provision or rental of the hall in Cvernovka to other entities can also be regarded as part of this model. Examples of such educational events in the past or the present include a series of lectures called *Pamäť* (*Memory*); a documentary and educational series on industrial heritage sites and abandoned buildings *Čierne diery* (*Black Holes*);

regular discussions of the *LaUrBa* platform (Laboratory of the Urbanism of Bratislava) on the development of the capital city; a series of lectures *PamMap* on the history of Bratislava, and a series of events *PechaKucha Night Bratislava*, consisting of short interactive lectures by artists, scientists, and activists on various topics. The annual *Festival Nasuti* is an important part of Cvernovka's programme which, by combining art and technology, raises awareness about environmental sustainability and waste management issues. In 2019, the *Science Slam* event focusing on the popularisation of science and research was launched, co-organised by the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

The second level of activism in the field of education, mentioned in the introductory part of the sub-chapter, evolves at the level of the activities and events carried out or organised by the initiatives based in Cvernovka. One of these associations is Edurama, which uses dramatic methods in the education and development of children's and adults' personality. The Edudrama workshops and performances reflect on historical and social issues in a playful way (e.g. World War II, the prevention of bullying, intergenerational relationships), and are held directly at elementary schools.

*“What we do primarily is programmes for schools. These are usually organised at schools, but we also try to move them from the school environment to our centre to eliminate disruptive effects. Afternoon spare time activities and courses mainly for children as well as adults. Seminars and trainings for teachers are usually held on Tuesday afternoon. And during weekends and special days, such as Santa Claus Day or Children's Day, we organise events for families with children. And we have children's performances every Saturday” (F\_1984).*

The educational centre Freedu, focused on the tutoring of pupils of elementary and secondary school, is also based in Nová Cvernovka. The civic association FAScinating Children runs a diagnostics and therapy centre for the fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), and its aim is to raise public awareness about this syndrome. Coworking Cvernovka also sets up educational programmes in the form of discussions, lectures, and workshops mainly on communication, personal development, parenthood, and ecology. The studio of the Bartinki fashion brand organises sewing and clothes production and upcycling, including in the form of a summer school for children. The Black Holes (Čierne diery) project focuses on the popularisation of industrial heritage sites and abandoned places with the aim to preserve and protect them. This happens mainly by means of online articles, a repeatedly sold out book published in 2018,<sup>26</sup> by creating maps of technical heritage sites at different locations and by means of art – the production and

<sup>26</sup> See: BEŇÁK, M. – LIPTÁK, M. – SARVAŠ, A. (2018). Čierne diery: Priemyselné pamiatky a zabudnuté miesta Slovenska, Bratislava: Čierne diery.

sale of extremely popular graphics of some monuments, created in cooperation with artists on a special printer – a risograph. In addition to awareness-raising, the Black Holes are also known for their direct interventions in the process of preservation of some industrial objects:

*“We seek to act primarily with soft force to make people realise what is valuable in those monuments, let’s call it educational activism. But when there is a situation when we feel that something concrete matters with some specific result, we switch to more direct activism, like filing a proposal to the monuments protection office to register an object as a national cultural heritage site, if it makes sense” (M\_1988).*

These examples show that educating the public and awareness-raising about different topics and issues are important forms of activism within Nová Cvernovka’s activities. This type of civic activism, also called educational activism, is based on the argument that social movements and civic activism can become educational processes, involving a lot of learning, theorising, research, and other types of intellectual activities. However, many people still perceive activism as an area separated from education, linked primarily to academic and scientific institutions (Choudry, 2014: 89). The educational programme organised specifically for secondary school students shows that these activities can work also as a complementary element of formal institutional education.

An important aspect of these initiatives is the combining of different artistic genres with the process of education and informing. While Edudrama’s activities use dramatic genres, visual art plays a primary role in educational exhibitions on anniversaries of important events, while graphic art works depict industrial heritage sites. In the broader sense, we can speak about the manifestations of art activism where artists and activists seek to change through art the living conditions of people, increase awareness about environmental problems, or offer access to culture and education to different groups of inhabitants (Groys, 2014). The boundaries between education, civic activism, and art are thus often unclear, because the educational effect is comprised automatically in many expressions of art. One example related to the activities of Nová Cvernovka is the turn of the current curatorship of exhibitions towards education. Educational formats and methods became omnipresent in the art curatorship practice and in the production of contemporary art. While discussions, lectures, symposia, and educational programmes played a rather peripheral role in the museum and gallery exhibitions for a long time, they are now becoming the central part of their programmes (O’Neill – Wilson, 2010: 12).

## Raising of and reflecting on new topics and concepts

The development of society can also be observed through the example of civic activism where many topics and concepts that were not in citizens' centre of attention in the last century now come to the fore. They concern mainly ecology and the environment and often deal with the problems of contemporary cities. Many of them can be found among the activities of Nová Cvernovka as well. The last type of civic activism comprises the raising, popularisation, and practical use of progressive and innovative topics and concepts. The attribute 'new' in the name of this type refers to the fact that these topics are not yet very widespread in Slovakia and have come to the fore only in recent years, such as environmental sustainability and ecological liquidation of building waste, the running of a community garden and social housing based on the housing first concept, the concept of slowness in various contexts (slow life style, slow fashion), the previously mentioned education using dramatic methods, or the prevention and therapy of the fetal alcohol syndrome. As with the previous type, these topics are raised either by the Cvernovka Foundation or on the initiative of some tenants. The described initiatives are partly related to education and awareness-raising, however, I analyse them separately, since the research has pointed out their great significance in the context of Nová Cvernovka, which goes beyond the very field of providing information to the public.

The first category, i.e. the 'central' topics of the Cvernovka Foundation, includes mainly environmental sustainability, ecological liquidation of building waste, and the running of a community garden. Another aim of the Foundation is to implement ecological building and architectonic solutions in the operation of buildings and surrounding areas, which is one of the tasks of the Ekoboard that works on a study of green innovations to be implemented within the Nová Cvernovka complex.

*"Regarding our values, one of them is trust and the other one, in my opinion, sustainability. It is something that has a fundamental meaning for us. The Ekoboard has been created here as an association of inventors, scientists, and architects, who are now working on a project of what could be done here. It has various elements – flushing by rainwater, a sewer collection system with subsequent transformation into methane, solar panels, green roofs, and many other things" (M\_1980).*

Ecological liquidation and various uses of the building waste combined with art is the central theme of the annual Nasuti Festival. It is the first contemporary art festival ever with an environmental focus in Slovakia. It aims at combining art and creativity with innovations and ecological thinking in the form of lectures, workshops, discussions, installations, and art performances. The initial idea of this festival emerged after the reconstruction of the former school

buildings, which produced a large amount of unsorted building material – rubble gathered in the backyard. Rubble forms the central motif of the festival and of its programme.

There is also a community permaculture garden, created, cultivated, and used by the people working in Nová Cvernovka. In addition to the growing of fruits, vegetables, and herbs, they are systematically dealing with composting. Environmentally friendly methods are present also in the maintenance of the entire Cvernovka site, for example, in the form of waste minimisation and sorting, water management, or manual mowing.

The new concepts used in Nová Cvernovka include the *housing first* principle, on which the pilot rental housing project for homeless people *Housing Cverna* is based as an initiative by the Vagus civic association, carried out in collaboration with the Cvernovka Foundation and other partners. The *housing first* concept evolved in the 1990s in New York and its objective is to provide affordable rental housing to homeless people or other disadvantaged population groups. In this concept, housing is the starting point rather than the ultimate goal. The expected positive impacts of housing are clients' financial literacy, improvement of their health condition, and social support (Pleace, 2017: 19). The housing first concept is explained by one of the respondents:

*“It is a pilot project, and its aim is to prove what foreign literature or foreign practice says. I mean, whether it really works in practice and whether it is feasible under the Slovak or Bratislava conditions... What is still common here is the merit system – if you do this, I will help you with that. And this is quite the opposite, you get housing free of charge just because you live out in the street. And this works indeed, these guys started to deal with their financial situation after a couple of months in terms of financial literacy, they started to care for their health condition, which is impossible while you're out in the street, because you have debts and you can't visit the doctor. They started to seek a job, they are employed on a permanent or part-time basis, legally, and are able to keep their job. It never happened to us that they wouldn't pay the rent. They start to deal with things like when you have spare time. I have spare time, what can I do?” (F\_1988).*

Another still little widespread concept – slow life style – is comprised mainly in the activities of the Cabinet of Slowness. In addition to library activities, this association organises lectures, discussions, and workshops on creativity, reading with understanding, health, ecology, and sustainable life.

*“We build on the fact that there are studios directly in Cvernovka as well as people who have a similar view of things like us. That they seek to promote a life style that is based more on coming together and cooperation. We call it slowness; however, this term refers to many things that are part of a normal healthy life style: ecology, taste,*

*aesthetics, and other areas. And we also organised workshops, lectures, as well as debates and discussions” (M\_1976).*

The slowness concept also forms the background of the activities of the Bartinki fashion brand, which is based in Nová Cvernovka and builds on the idea of slow fashion. Even though several definitions exist for this term, slow fashion usually describes locally made clothes, using sustainable and recycled materials. This fashion style provides space for individual style, promotes education on the manufacturing of such clothes, and emphasises the durability of such products (Štefko – Steffek, 2018). The activities of this fashion brand include the raising of awareness about clothing industry issues and engagement in the *Fashion Revolution* global movement, which emerged as a response to the tragic collapse of a textile factory in Bangladesh in 2013 with 1,138 casualties. The principal goal of this movement is to achieve a safer, more ethical, greener, and more transparent functioning of the fashion industry with an emphasis on human rights, safety, fair appraisal of workers, and environment-friendly products (British Council – Fashion Revolution, 2019: 9–16).

Jacobsson (2015b: 18) links the presence of innovative topics and concepts in the civic activism of post-socialist countries to the phenomenon of progressive modernism which she considers a way of cultivation of modern identity and the rejection of some parts of the past. According to her, the region is characterised by two principal contradictions: on the one hand, it is the contradiction between nostalgia for the historic era before socialism and idealisation of Western cities and societies. On the other hand, there is a contradiction between negotiating its position within Europe and preserving its national and local identity.

The reflection on these topics by civic activists is, among other things, the consequence of increased citizens’ awareness about global changes and challenges (such as environmental issues, consumption patterns, or migration) and their impact on the local context. This also relates to an easier access to information and partly to generational changes. It is mainly young people who are the actors of urban activism in Central and Eastern European countries, who have no memories of socialism and can travel, study, and work abroad, build international relationships, and shape their collective identity on a different basis compared to, for example, their parents (Bitušíková, 2015b: 119). The context of foreign experience is important also in the case of Nová Cvernovka. The interviews showed that several respondents lived abroad for some time, which influenced them in terms of their personal attitudes, art, work, as well as civil activities. The tendency of the Cvernovka Foundation to support innovative concepts, as manifested in the administration and functioning of the buildings and the complex as such, as well as in the cultural and educational programmes, makes Nová Cvernovka become an appropriate platform for innovative and progressive topics and activities. In this framework, the actors of the cultural and

creative centre can also draw on their experience obtained abroad. This is well proven by the following statement of a respondent:

*“Since me and my husband are about to move to Slovakia, I have needed some space. I have been to Slovakia for two years, and I have found out that Cvernovka is the best thing that could have happened to me. As I am gradually realising, I would have suffered elsewhere with my way of thinking and with my opinions. Nová Cvernovka is a kind of a bubble in a bubble; you have Bratislava and the rest of Slovakia. And the people that have travelled around and seen things and have different opinions, I don't know how to say it, well, these people sometimes have a problem to be understood elsewhere. The community here is an absolute top. I don't have to explain anything to anyone” (F\_1978).*

As I have emphasised several times, civic activism in the Central and Eastern European region is characterised by its tendency to promote local issues. However, this focus on local phenomena and issues often derives from global topics related to environmentalism, a sustainable life style, protection of the cultural heritage, or global social and political movements (Bitušíková, 2015b: 120). One example is the activities within community gardens, which can also be found in Nová Cvernovka. Community gardening is a newly created form of bottom-up activism in Slovakia. It is based on the engagement and enthusiasm of (mainly) the younger generation of citizens who wish to transform unused premises, cultivate fresh crops, and strengthen social ties. Even though community gardening is rather a non-political form of participation, its essence can be considered political, since the motivations of the actors are often closely related to global political and environmental issues, such as preference for local foods over imported ones, sustainability of the urban life style, or climate change issues. Besides global issues, the community dimension is also important, based on the creation of social ties and a meaningful use of leisure time (Bitušíková, 2016: 37–38). The research suggests that, in the case of community gardening in Nová Cvernovka, the values of ecology and environmental sustainability are the most important ones.

The tendency of these concepts to promote sustainability, ecology, a slow and ethical life style does not mean that these manifestations of civic activism are strictly non-political. According to Jacobsson and Korolczuk (2019), in the research on civic activism, it is necessary to broaden our understanding of political engagement to include the wide range of activities aimed at social changes. Although their actors often reject to be labelled political activists (or activists in the general sense), through their activities they seek to challenge the status quo. It is therefore necessary to go beyond the limited vision of the political scene linked to power institutions and look at how power circulates in society through daily meetings and interactions.

## Overall picture of civic activism in Nová Cvernovka

The classification of the civic activities of Nová Cvernovka into five basic categories enables their analysis through the lens of the theoretical works on urban social movements in the post-socialist context. In addition, such classification draws the attention to the thematic diversity of these manifestations. However, some generalisations also arise from the analysis, which can be applied to the overall picture of civic participation in this cultural and creative centre and will be discussed in this sub-chapter.

The actors of civic activism in Nová Cvernovka are usually people who do not identify themselves as civic activists and, in some cases, they do not link their actions to civic activism at all. Many inhabitants of post-socialist cities feel the need to respond to chaotic ownership relations, price increase, and the deterioration of the living conditions, and are therefore involved in political practices without reflecting themselves as activists. Meetings with people that have found themselves in similar situations, experience sharing, and common activities sometimes become a formative experience that shape new collective teams, identities, and solidarity (Jacobsson – Korolczuk, 2019). This phenomenon is present in Nová Cvernovka also because, in addition to civic activism, most respondents deal with other activities, such as artistic design, cultural production, management of the cultural and creative centre, communication with the authorities and local or regional self-governments, etc. Therefore, the boundaries between civic activism and other activities are not fixed, and the persons involved in activism do not necessarily reflect themselves consciously as civil activists. A certain role is played by the fact that activism became a key area for Cvernovka only a couple of years ago. Thus, some have dealt with activism for a relatively short period and often in the form of accompanying activities or artistic or organisational work. The identity of a “civic activist” is therefore not necessarily created and reflected in them.

An important role in the creation of this identity is played by ‘common places’ (Jacobsson – Korolczuk, 2019), an example of which is Nová Cvernovka. These are places which bridge individuals into common actions, and are therefore necessary to mobilise collective action among citizens who do not necessarily identify themselves as civic activists. It is places with shared importance where they discuss common topics and interests. The common feature of many described manifestations of activism in Nová Cvernovka is the reflection on issues and events which are important at the given time and appear in the public or media discourse. This takes place not only by directly responding to the current social and political events (which forms one of the defined types of civic activism), but also at the level of public mobilisation (issues related to the insufficient protection and demolition of industrial architecture), education (round anniversaries of important events), and a reflection on new topics and approaches (e.g.

environmental issues and ecology). Through the transformation potential of reflecting on and solving daily problems, the city becomes an arena that forms political subjectivity, individual and collective action, and mobilises citizens towards participation. This is particularly important in the Central and Eastern European region where socialism rather dispersed individuals and strengthened the domestic, private sphere to the detriment of the public one. (ibid.)

The manifestations of civic participation related to Cvernovka should be explored in the context of the overall story of this centre. Over the recent years, Cvernovka has gone through changes which were related mainly to the uncertain future of the centre in the original premises and to the moving to the current place. The common denominator of these changes is mainly the professionalisation and institutionalisation of Nová Cvernovka. These processes can also be observed in civic activism. Many originally spontaneous initiatives and goals have become more formalised and are currently defined among the goals of the Cvernovka Foundation. In addition, at the institutional level, the Foundation joins various cooperation projects and civic initiatives. Professionalisation and institutionalisation of civic activism entities are quite a frequent phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe. This occurs due to the financing of initiatives, their dependence on project funds, or efforts to adapt to the applicable legislation and public policy makers (Jacobsson, 2015b; Jacobsson – Korolczuk, 2019). In the case of the Cvernovka Foundation, it was primarily an effort to gain support from the public and the Bratislava Self-Governing Region in setting up cooperation, the key motif of which was the preservation of this artistic community and its relocation to the new premises.

Several examples of the type of transactional activism widespread in Europe can be found within the civic activism associated with Nová Cvernovka. Transactional activism is based on long-lasting or temporary ties between non-governmental organisations and on their cooperation with other institutions (Petrova – Tarrow, 2007). It is this type of networking with other cultural and creative centres, organisations, and regional or local authorities that represents one of the five defined categories of civic activism. These activities aim at the raising of awareness about the activities of cultural and creative centres and the building of mutual trust in the common projects of the non-profit sector and local or regional authorities. However, the cooperation element is also present in other types, such as education, responding to current social and political events, and the raising of new issues and concepts. Nová Cvernovka offers a fertile soil for cooperation between various actors, as it brings together within its premises numerous initiatives, NGOs, artistic teams, and start-ups. Many of them provide concurrence not only in the field of activism, but also in their work or artistic activities.

There is one more important characteristic feature of the civic activism in Nová Cvernovka that relates to transactional activism: the frequent interaction of the

spheres of culture, art, and civil society. The combining of these topics is typical of cultural and creative centres or independent cultural centres in Slovakia. It is still a relatively new type of institutions which have emerged only in the past five to ten years. These centres concentrate various civic initiatives and cultural activities and offer space for creative, artistic self-expression, and a reflection on social issues. The initiatives of civil society in the field of culture are thus both innovative and influential (Strečanský, 2017: 101).

## Chapter 6:

### **ANALYSIS OF TRANSACTIONAL ACTIVISM OF THE CVERNOVKA FOUNDATION**

The research on civic activism in Nová Cvernovka has identified a considerable occurrence of various types of coalitions and cooperation projects as manifestations of transactional activism, which became the bases for one of the five defined types of activism presented on the previous pages. Their definition has significantly facilitated the analysis of the observed manifestations of civic participation. It should be mentioned, though, that the boundaries between these categories are not fixed and that examples of cooperation, common projects, and networking can be found in each of them. This fact directed my scientific interest towards transactional activism and led me to the fundamental question of my analysis – why is transactional activism typical of Nová Cvernovka's activities?

The answering of this question raises an important challenge – the cultural and creative centre itself is a too broad category for grasping the analysis. It also comprises a large number of studios and individuals who do not deal with civic activism. In addition, we cannot speak of an 'organisation' in the true sense, since the centre brings together within its premises several organisations, initiatives, artists, and creative industry staff. And it is cooperation, coalitions, and common platforms between organisations or between one organisation and other partners that forms the basis of transactional activism. It is therefore necessary to reduce the rather vague and analytically difficult to define category of Nová Cvernovka to a more specific organisational unit. Thus, the subject of this analysis is the Cvernovka Foundation as the manager of the entire cultural and creative centre. This specification is suitable also for observing the cooperation of Nová Cvernovka with their partners 'from outside' – local and regional authorities, the media or other cultural and creative centres, since Nová Cvernovka is represented by the Cvernovka Foundation in these transactions. The main advantage of this specification is the fact that it also allows for grasping cooperation projects running inside the cultural and creative centre, these being transactions between the Cvernovka Foundation and other organisations and initiatives based there. It is also important to accurately define the timeframe of the analysed manifestations of transactional activism. Examples of cooperation projects in the field of civic activism in Cvernovka, though less numerous and less formal, can also be found in the period before the Cvernovka Foundation was established. However, since my analysis concerns this organisation, it will

comprise manifestations of transactional activism from the establishment of the Cvernovka Foundation in December 2015 until the time of my analysis in March 2020.

At this point, it is important to dedicate a few sentences to the mutual relationships between the tenants and the Cvernovka Foundation. The individuals, groups, and organisations are not non-critical supporters of the Foundation. Their mutual relationships are defined primarily by paying a rent to the Cvernovka Foundation – the manager of Nová Cvernovka. Several respondents used a metaphor, comparing the Foundation's position to a housekeeper who, for a fee, takes care for the common premises and the general infrastructure of a flat building and fixes problems. In the case of many groups and studios, the 'cooperation' with the Cvernovka Foundation ends with the payment of the rent, while others joint common cooperation and projects, mainly in the field of education, the organisation of events, or reflection on new topics and concepts. However, it is often problematic to outline a clear boundary between the Cvernovka Foundation and Nová Cvernovka. Even though the former is a more formalised organisation with a legally defined structure, purpose, and members, as the manager of the cultural and creative centre it has a large impact on Nová Cvernovka as such and, in its activities, it can draw also from the resources offered by the cultural and creative centre.

To respond the fundamental question of the analysis, in this chapter I seek answers to several related questions using the theoretical concept of transactional activism: With what partners does the Cvernovka Foundation enters cooperation within civic activism? What are the goals, strategies, and the action repertoire of such cooperation? What is the impact of the Cvernovka's Foundation strategic capacity and resources on transactional activism? My work with this concept has also indicated certain weaknesses, limitations, and the importance of its further conceptualisation for the broader field of civic activism, as many researchers focus primarily on political activism. In the concluding part of this chapter, I shall offer some ideas for the theoretical concept of transactional activism, as resulted from the analysis.

### **Analysed manifestations of transactional activism of the Cvernovka Foundation**

It should be defined at the beginning which of the described manifestations of civic activism I consider transactional activism to include it in this analysis. As previously noted and described in connection with the operationalisation of transactional activism, the primary criterion is interconnected transaction ties as defined by Diviák and Mazák (2017), i.e. concrete joint work, exchange of resources, or the distribution of tasks among stakeholders.

Further to the above, the following manifestations of civic activism categories have been included in the analysis of transactional activism of the Cvernovka Foundation:

- 1. Public mobilisation by Cvernovka:** informing and mobilising the public with the aim to gain supporters during negotiations with the Bratislava Self-Governing Region and moving to the current premises (cooperation with the media); voluntary team work and community action during the relocation to the new premises and their reconstruction; crowdfunding campaigns (transactions with the public or with concrete donors); participatory processes in collaboration with civic associations based in the surrounding area.
- 2. Cooperation with other entities in the raising of awareness about the functioning of cultural and creative centres – ‘Trust-building’:** cooperation with the Bratislava Self-Governing Region in the organisation of educational activities for schools; cooperation with the Trnava Self-Governing Region in the preparation of the publication *Don't Sell! Develop!* and in establishing the Arta cultural and creative centre in Piešťany; networking and the creation of common platforms with other cultural and creative centres in Slovakia (*Antenna – Network for Independent Culture*) and abroad (*Trans Europe Halls*).
- 3. Reflecting on current social and political events:** initial cooperation with the civic initiative *Great Anti-Corruption March* (later transformed into the civic movement *For a Decent Slovakia*) shortly after the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová in spring 2018; mobilisation of institutions and organisations by formulating the *Declaration of independent cultural centres, cultural and educational institutions and civic communities in Slovakia*; support for the initiative *We Stand by Culture*; co-creation and support of the climate initiative *Let's Not Waste Time*.
- 4. Public education and awareness-raising:** educational exhibitions at the entrance area and other educational events co-organised by the Cvernovka Foundation and other entities (e.g. Edudrama civic association, the Slovak Academy of Sciences, several universities, etc.).
- 5. Raising of and reflecting on new topics and concepts:** *Festival Nasuti* (whose content is created by the Cvernovka Foundation in collaboration with several entities and individuals); *Housing First* project in collaboration with Vagus civic association; the Cabinet of Slowness which, in collaboration with Bratislava – Nové Mesto city district, works also as a public library for the same.

## **Partners, strategies, and the action repertoire of the Cvernovka Foundation's transactional activism**

The next sub-chapter describes the entities with which the Cvernovka Foundation enters in active cooperation. I shall also observe the strategies and action repertoire of these manifestations. The knowledge of the circumstances of the cooperation and transactions is crucial for the understanding and overall analysis of transactional activism as its observable manifestations at the empirical level. It is important to know them also in order to understand the results of the analysis of resources and strategic capacity of the Cvernovka Foundations. These will explain why transactional activism is typical of Nová Cvernovka's activities.

Four main spheres of operation of the Cvernovka Foundation's partners within transactional activism have resulted from my field research. The first one is the non-governmental sector comprising non-governmental organisations and civic initiatives, as well as other cultural and creative centres and independent cultural institutions. With respect to NGOs and civic initiatives, it should be mentioned that, in principle, they do not necessarily operate 'outside' Nová Cvernovka, as its cooperation develops also with some actors based directly in the cultural and creative centre. The main content of these manifestations are various forms of cooperation and joint projects (e.g. initial cooperation of the Cvernovka Foundation with the civic initiative *Great Anti-Corruption March*; *Housing Cverna* project implemented in cooperation with the Cvernovka Foundation and the Vagus civic association), as well as joint organisation of participatory processes or cultural, artistic, and educational events. The *Antenna* and *Trans Europe Halls* networks created with other cultural and creative centres in Slovakia and abroad can be considered examples of joint platforms. These types of cooperation emerge with the aim to set up a network of organisations serving for mutual communication and meetings with the aim to disseminate information, share know-how, or for further joint coordination of activities (Horvatovič, 2013: 55). As the following respondent's statement suggests, one of the goals of the *Antenna* network is to influence public policies in the field of cultural and creative centres. In this case, cooperation, and networking of several cultural institutions with a similar focus into a joint platform aims to increase the legitimacy and weight of the demands and facilitate communication between the different parties.

*"There is an effort to make Antenna take a certain direction, and in fact it does so, but little is known about the possibility of influencing public policies, what attitudes the state and local authorities take towards independent cultural centres" (M\_1981).*

Networking and communication with other cultural or educational institutions with a similar focus form the basis for petition initiatives which were critical about the current social and political events and environmental issues

(*Declaration of independent cultural centres, cultural and educational institutions, and civic communities in Slovakia; We Stand by Culture; Let's Not Waste Time*). These public collective actions target politicians, the media, and the public opinion and usually express clear political demands. With this, they partly differ from, for example, the organisation of cultural and educational events which are often a part of the action repertoire of transactional activism. Such events are also public, however, unlike petitions, they do not require the mobilisation of crowds and usually do not raise clear political demands, though they usually bear a certain political or social message (Čísař – Navrátil – Vráblíková, 2018: 12–13). Such petition initiatives thus suggest that, in certain cases, transactional activism can address political demands as well. These petitions were based on cooperation and mutual communication with institutions with a similar focus, which are usually on the list of their signatories. Mainly thanks to media coverage, they also worked with the public and were accompanied by a certain mobilisation effect. This sheds different light on the frequent argument on the weak mobilisation ability of transactional activism, which I shall discuss in detail later.

The second sphere of transactions and cooperation is the public sector. In this field, the Cvernovka Foundation collaborates mainly with the Bratislava Self-Governing Region (BSG). This partnership was of key importance when moving from the original 'old' Cvernovka to the present premises and relates also to the overall operation of the cultural and creative centre within the complex owned by the BSG. The details of cooperation are also defined in the rental contract. Hence, this is not a manifestation of civic activism and, therefore, this partnership that ensures the overall operation of the centre is not the subject of my analysis. However, the analysis comprises some educational activities for students of elementary and secondary schools, organised by the Cvernovka Foundation in collaboration with the Bratislava Self-Government Region.

Another regional authority with which the Foundation cooperates is the Trnava Self-Governing Region. This happened during the preparation of a manual for a more effective cooperation between local and regional authorities and civic initiatives in the establishment and operation of similar cultural and creative centres. The result is the publication *Nepredať! Zveľadiť!* (*Don't Sell! Develop!*), launched in December 2020. This book analyses the state of the unused properties of self-governments and, through existing examples, it proposes how to turn them into functioning and lively places. In addition, the Cvernovka Foundation acts as a consultant in the establishment of the Arta cultural and creative centre in Piešťany. Cooperation is also developed with the Bratislava – Nové Mesto city district in running a public library within the premises of the Cabinet of Slowness. We should also mention the collaboration with some state educational institutions in organising educational events, namely the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, or Comenius University in Bratislava.

The third, less represented sphere of partnership is cooperation with the private sector. In this category, I include the cooperation of the Cvernovka Foundation with the media, which was very intensive mainly at the time the 'old' Cvernovka was forced to leave its original spaces and its future was uncertain. Since this period involved targeted media coverage, the use of existing contacts and the organisation of several accompanying events, these manifestations can be considered transactional activism. As I have mentioned in the chapter on the overall story of Cvernovka, this effort (which one of the respondents called 'PR in the bud') aimed to win over public opinion and gain supporters, thus strengthening the position of the Cvernovka Foundation during negotiations with the Bratislava Self-Governing Region. As we already know, the result of this effort was an agreement with the BSG and the set-up of a partnership as a basis for the establishment and current functioning of Nová Cvernovka at Račianska Street.

The research by Lukáš Horvatovič (2013: 45–46), dealing with the transactional activism of non-governmental organisations in Slovakia, identified four areas in which organisations search for potential partners for cooperation. According to him, apart from the non-governmental, state, and private sectors, the fourth sphere is the public itself. In the case of Nová Cvernovka, I consider two successful crowdfunding campaigns to be a manifestation of transactional activism with public partnership, in which 16,800 euros were raised during the first campaign and 30,000 euros in the second one for the process of relocation and for the new infrastructure of the cultural and creative centre. We should also mention the ongoing crowdfunding initiative to finance a new public park in the vicinity of the centre. However, the classification of these campaigns as manifestations of transactional activism opens a theoretical debate and points out the need for a more accurate conceptualisation of this term. Several theorists of transactional activism put it in the context of low mobilisation ability (e.g. Císař, 2008, 2013a, 2013b; Petrova – Tarrow, 2007). They argue that transactional activism is a way of compensating for the lack of resources and weaker ability of people's mobilisation in the case of many organisations in Central and Eastern Europe. When it comes to resources, this argument applies also in the case of Nová Cvernovka, since the aim of crowdfunding campaigns was to obtain missing finance. On the other hand, the key to success of crowdfunding campaigns is the ability of organisations to reach out to and mobilise the public with the intention of obtaining financial donations from concrete supporters. However, transactional activism works on a similar principle, capturing the ability of organisations to enter in transactions with other entities (Císař, 2008: 28). Nová Cvernovka's crowdfunding campaigns were characterised by an exchange of resources – a transaction. The authors of projects offered potential donors mainly works of art (manually printed postcards, graphic art works, paintings, photographs, and books) created by the people based in Cvernovka

as a consideration. Each object was associated with a concrete financial contribution. In the campaign *'Light and sound for live culture in Nová Cvernovka'*, its amount attained between 5 to 1,000 euros.

The described petition initiatives as well as cooperation and exchange of transactions with the media and Nová Cvernovka supporters suggests that working with the public can be one of the strategies also with respect to transactional activism. It is an important finding, as it broadens the view of the relationship between the mobilisation ability of organisations and transactional activism. I shall return to this issue later. However, to understand the relations between an organisation's mobilisation ability and transactional activism, it is necessary to dig deeper, for example, by means of an analysis of the strategic capacity and the presence of resources. These will be the subject of the next two sub-chapters in the context of the Cvernovka Foundation.

### **The strategic capacity of the Cvernovka Foundation**

To understand transactional activism processes in a particular organisation, it is important to analyse its strategic capacity and the degree of presence of different types of resources, since these terms have an important position within the theoretical concept of transactional activism. I define strategic capacity as a targeted behaviour of the organisation's management upon an efficient mobilisation of resources to achieve the organisation's goals (Ganz, 2000: 1010). It involves the selection and efforts of leaders, leadership knowledge and skills, as well as the allocation of available resources. The strategic capacity concept emphasises the fact that civic activism organisations are not only passive entities formed by external donors, but actively decide about their goals and actions (Andrews et al., 2010). The analytical difference between the strategic capacity and resources stresses the difference between the internal agenda of an organisation and its resources which can be given also externally. Organisations with a high strategic capacity have a leading position and use internal processes that can develop motivation, acquire knowledge, and enhance skills. These contribute to a more effective solution of problems and pursue the organisation's goals. At the same time, strategic capacity can serve as a compensator for the lack of resources and a tool for overcoming a complicated and difficult period of the organisation (Císař – Navrátil – Vráblíková, 2018: 3–4).

The question is what specific manifestations and factors can be considered strategic capacity. Ganz (2000) distinguishes three dimensions of strategic capacity – (1) networks, (2) the character of the management and employees, and (3) organisational structure. The argument that strategic capacity can be either a potential intermediary of resources or compensation for the lack of resources applies to all three dimensions (Císař – Navrátil – Vráblíková, 2018: 5). I shall

explain these three dimensions on the following pages and analyse the strategic capacity of the Cvernovka Foundation from their perspective.

### 1. Networks

The essence of transactional activism is networks and links to other organisations, public authorities, and institutions. These so-called weak organisational links (Diani, 2011) strengthen the strategic capacity of organisations, because they provide for resources, ideas, know-how and innovations, and reduce the costs of specific actions in achieving the set goals. Hence, in general, organisations with a larger number of weak organisational links are expected to manifest rather those types of activism which are not primarily based on mass collective mobilisation – i.e. transactional activism and lobbying. This effect should apply mainly to horizontally structured networks, such as coalitions between organisations. The reason for preferring activities which are not based on mass collective mobilisation is that ‘weak’ links between organisations differ from ‘strong’ ones which capture social ties with the organisation’s own supporters, the local community, or members (Císař – Navrátil – Vráblíková, 2018: 5).

These weak organisational networks form an important element of the Cvernovka Foundation’s strategic capacity. This argument is based on the fact that the Foundation itself is part of the network operating within Nová Cvernovka’s premises. It is created by Nová Cvernovka’s tenants – organisations, initiatives, and individuals based in Nová Cvernovka. The association and cooperation of people with similar interests from the fields of culture, art, and civic engagement is a key characteristic of Cvernovka since its establishment, which is confirmed by the following interview excerpts:

*“What we have always presented to the deputies, the public or the media is that what made Cvernovka Cvernovka were human and professional ties. And it was not only about setting up studios, it was about those people who often collaborated in various projects, and those synergies was not just an intangible notion, but a real thing. Even during the process of acquiring this building, we always argued with various examples of cooperation projects whose results were often recognised globally – whether it was the eco-capsule or a firm that grew from three people to forty and moved to Digital Park (large administrative complex in Bratislava – note by the author)” (M\_1982).*

*“So to say, we are friends with the people around and by being together in a creative centre, you often get ideas about cooperation with the people that are close to you, and you can talk to them. This is how it is born. You have people in the corridors who produce fabrics or graphic art, and so you design some things together, because it comes to your mind intuitively, as you’ve got them across the corridor. This gives rise to different common ideas” (M\_1988).*

Even though the second statement mentions friendly relationships within Nová Cvernovka, the research suggests that the interpersonal relationships during 'old' Cvernovka times were more informal and friendly than at present. The professionalisation and institutionalisation of the functioning of Nová Cvernovka has also brought about the professionalisation and greater formality of relationships between individuals and organisations. Nevertheless, Nová Cvernovka is still characterised by a large degree of cooperation, common projects, and mutual help between people and initiatives that are based there – not only in the field of civic activism, but also in their professional activities or daily functioning of the centre. The presence of this cultural, artistic, and activist 'ecosystem' proves the Cvernovka Foundation's strong strategic capacity and is an impetus for the emergence of transactional activism. The spatial and thematic proximity of the people and organisations based in Nová Cvernovka facilitates cooperation also in the area of civic activism. There are several civic activism actors in Nová Cvernovka who know each other, have a certain history of cooperation behind, or have friendly relations. It is thus easier and less costly for them to seek 'allies' inside the cultural and creative centre. This is true also about the Cvernovka Foundation itself which often collaborates with the organisations and individuals based in Nová Cvernovka when pursuing its civic activism goals.

Nová Cvernovka's strategic capacity consists of ties not only within Nová Cvernovka, but also with actors beyond the centre. The multitude of such ties is also evidenced by a large number of manifestations of transactional activism with respect to other cultural and creative centres, civic associations, institutions, or regional and local authorities. The thematic diversity of Nová Cvernovka's activities is an important aspect of creating such networks. The functioning of this cultural and creative centre concerns a wide range of issues and approaches not only in the field of civic activism, but also in the sphere of culture, art, and business. The potential creation of links and cooperation with Nová Cvernovka may thus be interesting for a larger number of entities – civic initiatives, artists, or cultural and creative workers.

We should also mention the impacts of the urban environment, which also facilitates the creation of networks between organisations and other entities. One of the most important contributions to the topic of the impact of the urban environment on transactional activism was offered by Walter Nicholls (2008), who applied the network approach to the study of social movements in the urban context. His main conclusion is that, in general, the urban environment facilitates mobilisation due to the concentration of various groups and organisations whose interests overlap in the dense physical space of social relationships. This density and concentration help the creation of weak organisational links, providing a basis for the mobilisation of specialised resources and alliances. On the other hand, Nicholls also points out the issue of setting common frameworks for such cooperation, which can be problematic in the heterogeneous context of the urban

space – and which Petrova and Tarrow do not mention in their perspective of transactional activism (Dutchak, 2009: 19–20). In the case of the Cvernovka Foundation, the creation of common frameworks is also helped by the ‘internal’ ties of this centre. The individuals and organisations based there are part of the Bratislava ‘ecosystem’ in the field of civic activism, as well as art and culture. They thus have contacts with other organisations and can act as their intermediaries. With thematic synergies, cooperation with these entities may be more available to the Cvernovka Foundation than without the presence of such indirect links.

## **2. Management and employees**

The character and the activities of the management and staff members are another important aspect of the organisation’s strategic capacity, involving specialised knowledge, conceptual tools, activist know-how, as well as the skills and motivations of the stakeholders. Ganz and others (Ganz 2000, Andrews et al. 2010) specify several factors that enhance the strategic capacity of organisations’ management and employees. First, an organisation needs a group of highly-motivated key people who coordinate, organise, and mobilise their activities, by which they differ from ordinary members. Hence, the key people create the internal capacity of the organisation, which is thus less dependent on the number of members or supporters. A higher number of key persons brings a higher potential for innovations, since it provides space for more ideas and brainstorming. Organisations with a higher number of key members are thus more active, mainly by applying strategies which are not based on collective mobilisation (Císař – Navrátil – Vrábliková, 2018: 6–7). Even though, from the theoretical perspective, the impacts of active and key people on the organisation’s strategic capacity is logical, it should be added that the empirical examination of the categories ‘key member’ and ‘highly motivated member’ is problematic. This is particularly true about the Cvernovka Foundation. Such categories are easier to grasp for smaller organisations specialised in specific goals (e.g. human rights or environmental issues). In their case, it becomes clearer which skills and resources are crucial for the achievement of these goals. However, the activities of the Cvernovka Foundation are too diverse and, in addition to the management and administration of the centre, it involves programme creation, financial management, fundraising, etc. Civic activism is thus only one of the Foundation’s goals and even within this area, there is a diversity of topics and fields of action. With respect to the Cvernovka Foundation, we can observe a division of topics and tasks and a certain specialisation of the members in particular areas despite the fact that these tasks overlap sometimes. It can be said that the key person for any independent task or goal may be someone else. Hence, my aim was not to analyse and evaluate the ‘key position’ and motivation of the members of an organisation, but rather to focus on the third aspect of the organisation’s strategic capacity – its organisational structure which largely reflects the distribution of

tasks, competences, and the ways of achieving goals. In this context, the cultural and human resources are also important, and I shall deal with them later.

### **3. Organisational structure**

Regular and open meetings within an organisation enhance its strategic capacity, as they motivate members to evaluate the activities and functioning of the organisation. Openness to different points of view strengthens strategic capacity as well, since different perspectives lead to better decisions and innovations and exert pressure on the organisation's leaders. This suggests that the entities that organise meetings of their members and place emphasis on listening to them will be more active and will achieve their objectives easier (Císař – Navrátil – Vráblíková, 2018: 7).

When analysing the organisational structure of the Cvernovka Foundation, it is necessary to begin with its formal bodies defined by law: the board of directors, the executive board, the supervisory board, and the trustee. The supreme body of the Foundation is the board of directors composed of persons who represent the organisation externally and contribute fundamentally to its strategic direction and character. The supervisory board also include the representatives of the Bratislava Self-Governing Region who exercise not only the control function, but also have an advisory vote in the case of important decisions of the Foundation.

Apart from official structures, teams working on specific tasks and areas have been gradually set up, including the development and administration of the cultural and creative centre, financial management, programme production and creation, communication, project management, fundraising, and networking. Ekoboard, which deals with the environmental aspects of the complex (being important also in civic activism with a focus on ecology and environmental sustainability issues), Eduboard pursuing educational activities, the Architectonic Board, and the Visual Art Board act as informal platforms there. These platforms bring together experts from the given field who contribute to the creation of the public programme and come up with ideas for the overall functioning of the centre. The Tenants' Forum should also be mentioned in this context. Its main objective is to collect ideas and suggestions from the tenants concerning the management and direction of the cultural and creative centre. In addition, an assembly is held there twice a year, at which the members of the Cvernovka Foundation inform the tenants about their functioning and plans for the future. The newsletter, which is regularly distributed to the tenants, serves for this purpose as well, reporting about the conclusions of the meetings of the managing persons from different areas and structures within the Foundation with the aim to inform each other.

The functioning of these less formal platforms for cooperation, meetings and information proves that cooperation, the provision of information and the

collection of suggestions from people working within the premises of Nová Cvernovka are important for the Cvernovka Foundation. At the same time, these manifestations strengthen the strategic capacity of the Foundation when it comes to its organisational structure, forming a basis for communication, the expression of various views and opinions, and the raising of new issues. In addition, they offer the possibility to influence the direction of Nová Cvernovka also by the tenants of the cultural and creative centre, which results in the raising of new topics and the implementation of different ideas.

*“At the beginning, we had a lot of suggestions concerning communication, people had the feeling that they were little informed. This was caused, among other things, by the fact that during the first two years we were just happy that we existed, we didn’t even have time to communicate with each other, let alone communicate more actively outwards” (M\_1981).*

*“And then there is the community that we seek to engage. There are several levels. The first one is that we seek to inform people not only about what is going on in the centre, but also in the Foundation. Certainly, there are many such things. We felt that there was a communication gap during the first two years. Because people started to complain that they didn’t know what was happening, what were our plans, and where the money was going” (M\_1982).*

Nevertheless, these respondents’ statements show that the creation of informal organisational and communication platforms was a reaction to specific problems and the communication noise that was felt by many tenants. On the other hand, the emergence of thematic platforms (i.e. Ekoboard, Eduboard, the Architectonic Board, and Visual Art Board) related to the gradual raising of the issues that the Cvernovka Foundation deals with. This suggests that the organisational structure of Nová Cvernovka has undergone development. The aim of the Foundation in the future is to engage the tenants in the decision-making processes to a greater extent, including in the form of a participatory budget.

*“At the end of the day, from the next year on (from 2020 – note by the author), when the rent gets stabilised, we would like to transfer a certain part of the income to a special fund, to a participatory budget, and propose co-decision mechanisms for the use of the money that could serve primarily to this community” (M\_1982).*

*“We’d like to donate a part of this money to the community. Well, donate... let the community decide how it will be invested. We’d like to transfer more and more competences to them. However, this is accompanied by more responsibilities, and this is a never-ending discussion about what a democratic decision is and what is not. I’m a democrat, but certain things are untouchable, and, in some cases, it is important that*

*the community is involved and understands things. So, this is a kind of a process that is just being launched. We need a lot of facilitation, a lot of discussions” (M\_1980).*

As this sub-chapter showed, the implementation of measures to strengthen the organisational structure may temporarily limit and reduce the strategic capacity of mainly larger organisations. Such long-term and demanding process may bring along risks in the form of potential conflicts or a fuzzy line between the rights and responsibilities of the organisation itself (in this case, the Cvernovka Foundation) and other members (tenants of the cultural and creative centre). The research showed that the frequent outcome of the discussions of the Tenants’ Forum is comments and suggestions concerning the daily functioning of the centre. On one hand, their solutions contribute to the operation and better functioning of Nová Cvernovka, while on the other hand, they complicate the work of the Cvernovka Foundation and slow down some processes and activities in other areas.

### **Analysis of the Cvernovka Foundation’s resources**

The resources concept is also related to the organisation’s strategic capacity. It should be mentioned at this point that while strategic capacity focuses primarily on the internal agenda and capacity of the organisation, the origin of its resources may be external (Císař – Navrátil – Vráblíková, 2018: 3). As shown later, the available resources of the Cvernovka Foundation stem primarily from the organisation’s strategic capacity, as a result of which the boundaries between its internal agenda, networks, and organisational structure (i.e. strategic capacity) and resources are blurred. This is partly related to the specificities of the cultural and creative centre. If, for instance, the Cvernovka Foundation cooperates with another initiative from Nová Cvernovka in organising a training event, we can hardly speak of an external source of cooperation. In the case of transactions with entities outside the cultural and creative centre, the boundary is clearer externally, but these types of cooperation are motivated by the Cvernovka Foundation’s strategic capacity as well. This brings us to the conclusion that, in the case of the Cvernovka Foundation, its strategic capacity is rather a potential mediator of resources than a compensation for their absence.<sup>27</sup>

For a better illustration of this conclusion, I shall gradually focus on the Cvernovka Foundation through the perspective of resources. I shall use the typologisation of resources by Bob Edwards et al. (Edwards – McCarthy, 2004;

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<sup>27</sup> With this statement, I refer to the above quoted argument that the strategic capacity of an organisation may be a potential mediator of resources or a compensation for an absence of resources (Císař – Navrátil – Vráblíková, 2018: 5).

Edwards – Gillham, 2013), who identified five types of resources: moral, cultural, human, material, and social-organisational.

**1. Moral resources** include the legitimacy and integrity of an organisation as well as solidarity, sympathy, and support by celebrities. Collective actors who imitate institutionally, legitimately, and commonly expected procedures and attitudes to the major extent gain benefits compared to the organisations which do not meet these expectations. The support by celebrities may strengthen the effect and impact of campaigns, increase their media coverage, raise public attention, and open doors to policy makers and the providers of other types of resources. Moral resources can also be created from the inside of the organisation, however, it is a demanding and long-term process. Only those entities can succeed in this respect which deal with human rights, animal rights or environmentalism issues. These organisations thus create and disseminate moral values and ethical practices represented by the concepts of equality, fair trade, or sustainability (Edwards – Kane, 2014: 217).

Since moral resources are temporary and may be easily lost, they are less accessible and more appreciated as cultural resources (Edwards – Gillham, 2013: 1098). The moral resources of organisations are difficult to measure and cannot be identified with popularity or public awareness, even though these factors may also play role in their case. They often come from the environment outside the organisation or social movement, for instance, in the form of support by celebrities. In the case of the Cvernovka Foundation, I consider the declaring of Nová Cvernovka as the Cultural Event of 2017 to be such a moral resource. This prize was awarded on the basis of the voting of people from the cultural and artistic scene and was declared by one of the mostly read Slovak dailies.

The credibility of the organisation is another substantial element of its moral resources, contributing to the emergence of transactional activism, because potential cooperation partners may be more open towards transactions with an organisation that they consider trustworthy. The relationship between these two variables is mutual, because public awareness about the organisation's cooperation with other entities can also increase its credibility. When grasping moral resources in research, the fact that it is difficult to 'measure' them at the empirical level is a certain limitation. Specific actions by an organisation, awards won, or a successful common project does not necessarily increase its credibility in each sphere equally. The cooperation projects of the Cvernovka Foundation are carried out mainly with entities from related sectors, in particular art, culture, education, and civic society. In these projects, the Cvernovka Foundation has reached a certain moral credit and credibility also thanks to the years-long story of Cvernovka and examples of many cooperation projects with various actors. Hence, it is an entity well established (not only) in the field of civil society. The manifestations of cooperation pursuing trust-building between the non-profit

sector and regional or local authorities show that, with respect to support for the functioning of cultural and creative centres in Slovakia, the Foundation is active in seeking to improve mutual trust and, hence, increase its credibility.

**2. Cultural resources** are primarily conceptual tools and specialised knowledge that may be widespread, but is not generally known. It is knowledge about how to perform specific tasks, such as the organisation of events, festivals, and protests, managing a meeting, creation of an organisation, or the use of a new internet social network. This category thus involves tactical repertoires, organisational patterns, and know-how of how to mobilise people, produce events, or gain access to other resources (Edwards – Gillham, 2013: 1098–1099).

In the case of the Cvernovka Foundation, cultural resources have a strong position. They are represented, among other things, by experience in organising events tackling various issues. These resources form the basis for the organisation of cultural, artistic, and educational events as an important manifestation of Nová Cvernovka's civic activism. Cultural resources also include gradually obtained experience of the Cvernovka Foundation in managing, informing, and engaging the tenants' community. This area is closely related to social-organisational resources as well as the organisational structure that I analysed in the previous sub-chapter of the book on the Foundation's strategic capacity. The cultural resources also include knowledge and experience related to the obtaining of grants, fundraising, and networking with other entities. Their presence in the Cvernovka Foundation is proven also by the fact that the people working in it are focused on and specialised in these areas. The experience and expertise in the establishment and operation of a cultural and creative centre can also be considered a cultural resource, involving a broad range of knowledge in the field of legislation, financing, the functioning of local and regional self-governments, and culture. These cultural resources became the basis for cooperation between the Cvernovka Foundation and the Trnava Self-Governing Region.

*“We realised very quickly that it is our duty to transmit it further down. We thought that one of our plans and ambitions would be to send the know-how further. In our case, it is a type of successful and constructive cooperation between the civic, community, and municipal. Or with the public administration.” (M\_1977).*

**3. The human resources category** includes resources such as people's work and their experience, skills, expertise, and the ability to lead other people. The utility value of this knowledge depends on specific situations and objectives of the given activity (Edwards – Gillham, 2013: 1099). In the case of Cvernovka, human resources considerably relate to cultural resources, because the bearers of this knowledge, experience, and expertise are specific persons working in Nová Cvernovka. They are not only members of the Foundation, as the Foundation

can also draw from the human resources of studios and organisations working within the cultural and creative centres. In addition, the wealth of human resources contributes to the establishment of cooperation projects in various fields, including civic activism, as there is large number of people with different specialisations, acting at a single place, which increases the effectiveness of common projects.

*“It is a fact that one of the greatest forces is the people. There is indeed a big creative potential of Bratislava and, I can say, of Slovakia as well. And it is a unique thing that people can cooperate. All these interesting projects have been created through synergies, where two people join each other and do something. It is inspiring, indeed”* (M\_1980).

Mutual help and the principle of reciprocity between some studios and organisations is also present. At the time of relocation and reconstruction of the complex at Račianska Street, Cvernovka’s self-sufficiency was important. It was manifested by human resources that the Cvernovka Foundation disposed of – mainly through architects and engineers working in the centre. As the following quotation confirms, it was a typical example of a phenomenon where various types of resources can be mutually replaced and compensated for. In this case, the use of human resources replaced the missing material resources.

*“We had many architectonic studios in Cvernovka, as well as one for engineering design, it would have been extremely difficult without it. These people came together at the same table and agreed how the building would be operated. They did zoning and each studio took care of a particular issue. Toilets, club, staircases, access systems, parking. Each of them took care of something, and the engineers there were working on it; without them, we would hardly have anything. This was an added value, to have it ‘in the house’. If we were to pay for it at the beginning, well, I don’t know how it would have ended up”* (M\_1980).

4. This brings me smoothly to **material resources**, which combine what economists call financial and physical capital. These include money, resources, assets, spatial infrastructure, equipment, and the organisation’s consumables. Material resources receive most analytical attention in scientific works, because they are more tangible and more interchangeable. In other words, money can be transferred to another type of resources (e.g. in the form of rent for spaces or purchase of advertising), while reverse transfer is less frequent (Edwards – Gillham, 2013: 1099). However, the story of Cvernovka offers an example of the transformation of human resources to economic ones. It is the organisation’s self-sufficiency with respect to moving and reconstructing the current site that I described in the previous sub-chapter. Even though it was not a direct

transformation of a 'resource for resource', the use of the human potential 'from within' of Cvernovka resulted in savings. This principle is also present in some other activities of the Cvernovka Foundation, like in the preparation of the public park project in the surrounding area.

The economic model of this organisation is built on two main components. The first one is the operation of the Nová Cvernovka complex itself, which is financed primarily from payments of rent by the studios. These cover mainly energy costs, loan instalments, and the maintenance and administration of the building. The second component is the execution of the Foundation's public programmes, such as regular cultural programmes, the organisation of festivals and training events, art residence and visual art programme called Reactor, as well as the Cabinet of Slowness public library programme. These activities are financed exclusively from grants, support programmes, partnerships with the private or public sphere and, to a lesser degree, from entry and one-time rent (Cvernovka Foundation, 2018: 14). In this context, Nová Cvernovka's partnership with the foundation of a Slovak commercial bank, which has financially supported the centre's activities since 2017, should be highlighted. We can thus speak of the Foundation's self-sufficiency. The burden usually consists of unplanned expenses related to emergency situations due to the poor condition of the buildings. The relocation, reconstruction of buildings and the creation of the centre's infrastructure was a financially demanding process as well, for the management of which the crowdfunding campaigns were also important. The coronavirus pandemic, which significantly paralysed the functioning of culture in Slovakia in 2020, can also be considered an unplanned event. In December 2020, at the time of writing this paragraph, it seems that Nová Cvernovka will be able to cope economically with this difficult period. The key role in this respect is played by the fact that the economic model of the Cvernovka Foundation is based on several sources. Understandably, it is currently difficult to predict the future development of the pandemic and its impact on the cultural and artistic sector, and this cannot be the aim of this publication. However, it might become a major problem for the economic model of Cvernovka if several tenants lose the ability to pay rent for the cultural and creative centre's premises.

The spatial, technological, and production infrastructure is another important element of the material resources of the Cvernovka Foundation, mainly with regard to organising public events. This mainly includes appropriate indoor and outdoor premises (e.g. culture hall, bar, and outdoor area with a stage), sound and lighting system, and a production team of technicians that handle these systems.

5. The last, fifth category of resources are **social-organisational**, with respect to which Bob Edwards and Patrick F. Gillham (2013: 1099) identified three types: infrastructure, social networks, and organisations. They differ in the degree of their

organisational formality. Infrastructure is the social-organisational equivalent of public goods. Its function is to facilitate daily life and the functioning of the organisation. Access to social networks and, specifically, to organisations may be largely limited, which exacerbates existing inequalities between organisations. They thus seek to overcome the lack of these social-organisational resources by setting up coalitions and cooperation with other entities, which is a frequent reason for the emergence of transactional activism.

In the case of the Cvernovka Foundation, the concept of social-organisational resources considerably overlaps with its strategic capacity with respect to networks that I analysed in the first part of the previous sub-chapter. This includes the numerous weak organisational links of the Cvernovka Foundation to other entities within and beyond the cultural and creative centre, which form an important basis for the emerging cooperation projects and transactions (also) in the field of civic activism.

The existence of resources in organisations is not invariable. As the previous pages show, the individual types of resources are interchangeable. However, organisations can access resources in other ways, too. Bob Edwards and John D. McCarthy (2004: 131–135) identified four possible mechanisms of resource generation: aggregation, self-production, cooptation/appropriation, and patronage.

**Aggregation** is the merging of scattered and fragmented resources into collective ones that can subsequently be used for the purposes of the organisation. In the case of material resources, it is, for instance, fund raising or, in the case of human resources, the organisation's efforts to gain individuals with good qualities and properties. Cultural resources can be aggregated, for example, in the form of conferences where participants exchange knowledge and experience.

The second type is **self-production**, such as the acquiring of practical experience and new skills in the form of training and education, the sale of own products and services, the organisation of events, the development of relationships and contacts, or the creation of cooperation and coalitions.

The third mechanism of gaining resources is **cooptation**, i.e. the takeover of the resources collected by another entity. Cooptation occurs mainly by the admission into the organisation of new formal or informal groups which make their resources available.

The last, fourth mechanism is **patronage**. In this case, the organisation is provided resources by another organisation or an individual, usually material resources. This may or may not be associated with further interference by the patron in the functioning of the organisation.

The analysis suggests that the Cvernovka Foundation is characterised mainly by the first two mechanisms of obtaining resources: aggregation and self-production. Aggregation leads to the acquisition of a large part of human resources – in the form of the people working in Nová Cvernovka. Regarding

material resources, it is mainly the payment of rent by individual studios and organisations. The aggregation of the cultural resources takes place through the exchange of knowledge and experience between persons and organisations, including in the form of informal thematic platforms, such as Ekoboard, Eduboard, Architectonic Board, Visual Art Board and the Tenants' Forum. And finally, a part of the social-organisational resources consists of networks, contacts, and relationships between the entities operating in Nová Cvernovka. This, however, does not mean that the social-organisational resources are automatically available to the Foundation; however, they may be exchanged or acquired whenever necessary and in the case of cooperation.

The self-production of the Cvernovka Foundation's material resources is represented by the obtaining of resources from various grant and public sources and by a gradual building of the spatial, technological, and production infrastructure of Nová Cvernovka. The self-production of cultural resources includes the gradual acquisition of experience and knowledge on the operation of the cultural and creative centre, legislation, the functioning of culture and civic society, the provision of information to and the engagement of tenants as well as other relevant fields.

The mechanisms of cooptation and patronage are represented to a lesser degree. Cooptation is, for instance, the scenario where the Foundation 'admits' new tenants to its cultural and creative centre, through which it may obtain new resources. However, such replacement of the Nová Cvernovka's tenants is quite rare, as its capacities are full. It should also be added that access to such resources is not necessarily the key motivation for the admission of new tenants by the Cvernovka Foundation. I consider crowdfunding campaigns an example of patronage, where the donors themselves became patrons.

The analysis thus shows that the Cvernovka Foundation disposes of a relatively strong strategic capacity – mainly in the field of networks and links to other organisations and initiatives (within the cultural and creative centre as well as beyond) and internal organisational structure. The Foundation's activities can also draw from the resources among which cultural, human, and social-organisational ones are most strongly represented. The presence of material resources mainly in the form of infrastructures, which are necessary for the organisation of public events as one of the bases of civic activism in Nová Cvernovka, is also important.

### **The impacts of strategic capacity and access to resources on transactional activism in the Cvernovka Foundation**

The Cvernovka Foundation is an established civic initiative and manager of the Nová Cvernovka cultural and creative centre. The centre is characterised by

a rich human potential and active efforts to engage its tenants in decision-making processes. As we have seen, in addition to official organisational structures, informal thematic groups focused on architecture, visual art, education, and ecological aspects are also present. At the same time, Nová Cvernovka is a space for organising the public programme which copies the thematical heterogeneity of the centre. I looked at these aspects in the previous sub-chapters through the perspective of the organisation's strategic capacity and resources. These conclusions lead us to another analytical question – what is the impact of the Cvernovka Foundation's strategic capacity and its access to resources on transactional activism?

To answer this question, we need to recall some of the conclusions on the functioning of urban social movements in post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Theoretical literature often explains the widespread presence of transactional activism in this region with the fact that civil society organisations there have a smaller ability to mobilise people (or other types of resources), which leads to networking and cooperation. Císař and Navrátil (2010: 20–21) assume that the organisations that are able to mobilise members not only in terms of financing, but also volunteering and expertise, have a smaller tendency to establish contacts with other groups compared to those which are not successful in mobilisation. The organisations disposing of resources are less motivated to engage in inter-institutional networks. According to this theoretical argument, the creation of inter-organisational cooperation and partnerships is a tool by which organisations compensate for their insufficient mobilisation ability. Their legitimacy and effectiveness in achieving their objectives thus depends on their transactional capacity to connect and communicate with other organisations (*ibid.*: 5).

Access to resources is a frequently reflected argument also in the interpretation of the process of expansion of transactional activism in the Central and Eastern European region after the fall of socialism. While at the beginning of the 1990s, many civil society organisations were dependent on US funding programmes, they later became 'Europeanised'. This development deepened the trends introduced at the beginning of the 1990s, in particular their institutionalisation, the building of organisational capacities, bureaucratisation, and subsequent professionalisation. A large part of the organisations and movements in the field of the environment, human rights, and women's rights now receive a certain form of international financing – mostly from European Union structures. Their dependence on international financing enabled them to survive organisationally, even without the need for the mobilisation of resources from their members and supporters, which would have been a difficult task in the post-socialist situation of the politically relatively disinterested population. International financing thus created the conditions for the development of the transactional activism model (Císař, 2013b). In addition, in the process of fundraising from European Union

structures, what is important for organisations is self-presentation based on the activity and ability to join inter-organisational projects (Císař – Navrátil, 2010: 5).

There are two main interpretations of this process. Adam Fagan (2004, 2005) criticises the fact that foreign transfers and dependence on international resources prevented non-governmental organisations from joining local community processes, which led to their cooptation. Other researchers (e.g. Císař, 2010, 2013a; Petrova – Tarrow, 2007) refer to the concept of transactions, considering non-governmental organisations to be authorised to receive foreign sponsorship instead of seeing them radicalised or coopted (Diviák – Mazák, 2017). However, it should be reiterated that the above characteristics refer mainly to political activism. The research in Nová Cvernovka shows that transactional activism may be an appropriate strategy for a much broader spectrum of civic activism and should be conceptualised not only with an emphasis on political activism. This applies, for example, to public education, the obtaining of financial contributions from the institution's supporters, the raising of new topics and concepts, the networking of various cultural and educational institutions, and the efforts to influence public policies in concurrence with the management of the local authorities. These spheres are largely focused on local issues. And as we have seen, the economic model of Nová Cvernovka is based on several pillars and is not dependent existentially on international financing structures.

Some manifestations of cooperation and transactions of the Cvernovka Foundation confirm the argument that, in the framework of transactional activism, the interlinked actors seek to replace the lack of resources with the most effective use possible of newly established relationships between themselves and with other relevant allies (Šuška, 2014: 82). During the period when the Foundation needed to strengthen its position in connection with the negotiations with the Bratislava Self-Governing Region, cooperation with the media was important in increasing public awareness and, hence, Cvernovka's legitimacy. The crowdfunding campaigns were important to compensate for the missing finance that was needed for the subsequent relocation and reconstruction. Both strategies thus focused on the compensation for the lack of resources.

However, the studied manifestations and the analysis of the Cvernovka Foundation show that even a strong strategic capacity of the organisation and considerable presence of some types of resources may be an incentive for the emergence of transactional activism. Nevertheless, this finding is not contrary to the recent knowledge on transactional activism, but it rather expands it based on the study of a specific type of an establishment – a cultural and creative centre. My analysis suggests that transactional activism may also relate to the effort to use, to the largest extent possible, the strategic capacity and existing resources of the organisation in achieving its objectives in the field of civic activism. This is accompanied by the reduction of costs which is a sufficient motivation for organisations that could hypothetically manage to accomplish

their goals even without establishing cooperation. This is also the case of the Cvernovka Foundation. Its organisational structure and the large amount of weak organisational ties (either within the cultural and creative centre or with external entities) cause that it is less costly for the organisation to enter in cooperation and transactions, while increasing the effectiveness of achieving its objectives. One such example is the common projects of the Foundation with some organisations from Nová Cvernovka (e.g. with the civic associations Vagus and Edudrama), or the joint petition initiatives of cultural and creative centres or cultural and educational institutions. Transactional activism is typical of Nová Cvernovka also because its functioning since the times of its establishment in the original premises has been based on various types of cooperation and transactions – from daily manifestations of mutual help and communication up to common projects in the field of business, art, or civic activism. Certain self-sufficiency of the cultural and creative centre is also present, as manifested mainly during the reconstruction of the current premises in the form of involvement by the architectonic studios based in the centre. Another consequence of the strong position of Nová Cvernovka in the field of human and cultural resources is that it can focus on a broad spectrum of topics with relatively small costs. The existence of cultural resources (i.e. knowledge and experience) obtained from the operation of the cultural and creative centre is, among other things, the basis for cooperation between the Cvernovka Foundation and the Trnava Self-Governing Region. In addition, the thematic diversity of civic activism and the multitude of cooperating entities from various spheres have the potential to lead to the establishment of new links, the acquisition of resources or the strengthening of the strategic capacity of this organisation. As a result of these factors, the establishment of cooperation with various entities gradually became one of the declared objectives of the Cvernovka Foundation in the field of civic activism:

*“The Foundation has a mission and should have resources, and what we’re talking about now is what our vision and mission are and what we want to deal with. And, certainly, the civic motif or the effort the promote civic society either by joining initiatives or by granting funds, are a strong issue and we want to deal with it. And we’re partly doing so. In the future, the Foundation is to become an institution or organisation which will accumulate resources to be able to support various initiatives also beyond us. And supporting civic society is one of the pillars that we want to deal with. Even though we were created as an initiative of creative people and artists, there is a strong overlap with the civic sector and support from various non-profit initiatives” (M\_1982).*

This statement suggests that the ambition of the studied organisation is to exert even greater effort in the future to establish cooperation in the field of civic activism. In the recent years, the Foundation’s capacities were largely burdened

by the reconstruction of the complex and the launch of the centre's activities in the new premises. Hence, the goal is to focus more on foundation activities, including through the initiation of cooperation and support of civic initiatives. It can thus be assumed that Nová Cvernovka will continue being an inspirational place for studying transactional activism.

The analysis thus showed that the emergence of transactional activism is not necessarily associated only with the insufficient ability of organisations to mobilise people and obtain resources. This opinion is usually supported by the argument that organisations dealing with transactional activism (which mostly deals with post-materialist issues, such as environment or human rights) cannot count with a 'ready-made' community prepared to join or mobilise itself (Císař, 2013a). However, Nová Cvernovka is a specific case in this regard, as it gathers a large number of people in its premises and, during its functioning, it has also gained a numerous group of visitors, sympathisers, and supporters. This does not mean automatically a 'ready-made' community blindly supporting each step of the Cvernovka Foundation. This phenomenon, however, strengthens the strategic capacity of this entity and brings (or brought in the past) different types of resources – in particular, moral, human, and material ones.

The example of this cultural and creative centre shows that, in some cases, transactional activism may lead to people's mobilisation. For instance, cooperation with the media at the time of moving to Račianska Street brought many new sympathisers to Cvernovka who contributed to the success of the crowdfunding campaigns. The *Declaration of independent cultural centres, cultural and educational institutions, and civic communities in Slovakia*, which resulted from the Cvernovka Foundation's initiative after the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová in 2018, gradually gained 308 signatories from different institutions, organisations, and initiatives. It is worth mentioning the initial cooperation and communication of the Foundation with the civic initiative *Great Anti-Corruption March*, which later became independent under the name *For a Decent Slovakia*, though the support by the Cvernovka Foundation for this initiative continued even after. Another example is the civic platform *We Stand by Culture* which, apart from Nová Cvernovka, brings together dozens of cultural and educational institutions and almost 600 individuals as signatories. The online petition by this initiative, requesting the dismissal of the then Minister of Culture Ľubica Laššáková, was signed by over 9,000 individuals. These examples show that the drafting of joint declarations and the establishment of platforms with other organisations of a similar focus are not necessarily aimed at the strengthening and legitimisation of demands within an environment where it is difficult to obtain public support. Such activities may have the potential to reach out to and mobilise the public and the media when dealing with current political and social issues. It is the topicality of the demands and reflected topics that is an important basis for the mobilisation ability of many initiatives.

However, the mobilisation potential of different issues changes over time. For instance, environment protection and environmental sustainability issues, which have come to the fore in the last decade, are increasingly covered by the media and thus have a greater potential to mobilise people. Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham (1999, cit. in Kriesi, 2004: 72) introduced the term ‘discursive opportunity structure’ for this phenomenon, by which they mean political, cultural, and symbolic opportunities that identify what kind of ideas are legitimate and acceptable for the public and which of them can move the public opinion. The identification of the topics that have the potential to reach out to the public is also important in the activities of the Nová Cvernovka. During the period of the uncertain future of the ‘old’ Cvernovka, this mainly related to the criticism of the demolition of industrial heritage sites and the issue of their protection and pressure by the developers. While, initially, these issues were raised gradually and organically – by responding to concrete events, their media reflection has been transformed over time into a target strategy of the Cvernovka Foundation to gain public support with the aim to legitimise Cvernovka’s functioning. At present, the Cvernovka Foundation’s activities reflect on increasingly topical issues related to environmental sustainability, ecology, and social housing.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that working with the public is important for many civil society organisations. Public mobilisation can also be a source of funds, as we have seen in connection with crowdfunding campaigns. Movements and organisations dedicate a great part of their efforts to increasing the number of their supporters and fans, as citizens’ mobilisation largely depends on the available number of sympathisers (Edwards – McCarthy, 2004: 140). The role of the internet and social media is also vital in this process, as they can reduce the costs of participation, which potentially supports recruitment and the maintaining of new sympathisers. Cost reduction and increasing the effectiveness of mobilisation and coordination are the key features of websites and social media enabling real-time communication. This also facilitates easier dissemination of the goals, main ideas, and attitudes of particular movements or organisations (Cammaerts, 2015: 5).

As noted several times, the ability (or inability) of mobilisation is a frequent subject of the research on transactional activism. This happens also because the existing analyses of this concept have focused mainly on political activism. Other ways of working with the public are those where the organisation does not try to obtain something, but instead, seeks to give something to the public (Horvatovič, 2013: 70). The examples include educational activities typical of Nová Cvernovka, the raising of awareness about various issues, or cooperation with regional and local authorities in an effort to improve the conditions of the establishment and functioning of cultural and creative centres in Slovakia. This relates to another research findings – mobilisation, often mentioned in connection with this theoretical concept, and working with the public are not

necessarily a relevant strategy or goal of every manifestation of transactional activism. The broad spectrum of the manifestations of civic activism in Nová Cvernovka brings a diversity of goals, strategies, as well as reasons why particular entities join cooperation. The choice of strategies may be influenced by two main factors. The first one is the assessment of the costs and benefits that the given collective activity may bring. The second factor involves the goals that the organisation wishes to accomplish. By considering these factors, the actors evaluate the reaction of the political system or the public and choose the relevant strategies accordingly (Kriesi, 2004: 78). Based on his research, Horvatovič (2013: 47–49) identified three main reasons why non-governmental organisations in Slovakia enter transactional activism. The first one is their small internal capacity. In this case, the organisation realises based on its possibilities that it is unable to achieve the said objective on its own, and therefore seeks to enter some form of cooperation. This usually happens in the case of the lack of resources. The second reason identified are the conditions of financing, since only a few organisations can cover their activities from their own material resources. The third reason is efficiency to purposefully increase the chances to achieve the set goal. This includes, for example, the scenario where several organisations learn that they work on a similar thing and decide that it will be more efficient to join their forces, or when they choose to coordinate their activities. They can thus achieve a more efficient use of the resources, reduce their costs, or increase their legitimacy. Their aim may also be to enhance the functioning of the non-governmental sector itself by improving mutual communication and information sharing.

The first two reasons relate to the theoretical argument that transactional activism in the region is characterised primarily by the compensation for the lack of resources or the inability to mobilise supporters. These reasons for cooperation can also be found in the case of the Cvernovka Foundation. However, the research showed that a more frequent reason for cooperation (as well as the key factor in the choice of the strategy) is to increase efficiency in achieving the desired objectives. In practice, it is manifested by the Cvernovka Foundation joining projects with initiatives, organisations, and artists who often work directly within the premises of Nová Cvernovka. This occurs mainly in the field of education and the raising of new topics and concepts. It is also typical for the Cvernovka Foundation to co-create and join common platforms with other cultural and creative centres as well as cultural and educational institutions in commenting on current social, cultural, and environmental issues. We can also mention the cooperation with the regional authorities in publishing a manual whose aim is to increase the efficiency of cooperation between local and regional authorities and civic initiatives in the establishment and operation of cultural and creative centres. The common denominator of these manifestations is placing emphasis on efficiency in achieving the objectives – either by joint organisation of cultural

and educational events, by increasing the legitimacy and weight of the demands, or by using Nová Cvernovka's experience and know-how in practice.

### **Suggestions for the research on the theoretical concept of transactional activism**

In the final part of this chapter, I shall focus on some conclusions and generalisations that resulted from the use and application of the theoretical concept of transactional activism. These lines are not aimed to reconsider the existing knowledge on this type of participation, but rather to expand the theoretical perspective, contribute to a broader conceptualisation of transactional activism, and identify certain weaknesses of this theoretical approach.

The transactional activism concept has brought wider theoretical innovation in the research on social movements. According to Císař and Navrátil (2010: 4), transactional activism denies the definitions of social movements that depend on the ability to mobilise individuals and enables to conceptualise a new generation of activists. Transactional activists do not focus on mobilising individuals, as social movements are commonly viewed, but rather on the development of capacities that may lead to the shaping of public debates and to influencing the public through the media. In this context, a protest in the framework of transactional activism may have the form of statistics, disturbing photos, testimonies, posters, graffiti, lobbying, scientific and expert knowledge, legal appeals, film festivals, art exhibitions, conferences, as well as national or international efforts to create networks. The definition of the transactional activism concept has been particularly important in the research on social movements in post-socialist countries, as it has drawn attention to the broader spectrum of the manifestations of civic activism and helped reconsider the argument on the weak civil society in the Central and Eastern European region. Nevertheless, scholars often apply this theoretical concept primarily on the area of political activism. As a result, they often understand transactional activism as an opposite of the mass mobilisation of citizens, i.e. participatory activism. However, the example of Nová Cvernovka shows that transactional activism can be applied to a broader area of civil society and that its conclusions are beneficial also in the research of urban social movements or cultural and educational activism.

Due to the widespread presence of transactional activism in our region, Jacobsson and Korolczuk (2019) propose to conceptualise civil society as a process of relationships building and achievement of collective goals. This approach emphasises interactions between different collective actors which develop over time and, at the same time, identifies patterns of potential conflicts and the avoidance of cooperation. With respect to transactional activism, it is important to take into account its potential negative consequences as well, which may include

the marginalisation of more radical demands, various risks of cooperation, or clientelism. This approach reconsiders the common scientists' perspective of civic activism as a stable structure that can be captured by quantitative methods at any time. There is therefore the need for a deeper insight and examination of the question of how specific cooperation between organisations strengthens civil actors. This should lead to clearer conclusions on the role of transactions in strengthening civil society. The key to such findings may be qualitative research, the quantity of which in the field of transactional activism is still relatively small, especially in our region. Scientists often only assume strong transactional capacity between cooperating organisations, yet it is also necessary to focus on the forms of cooperation and mechanisms that have the potential to increase its efficiency (Diviak – Mazák, 2017).

The possible negative impacts of transactional activism in Central and Eastern Europe may also include the weakening potential for participatory activism. Because of the focus on cooperation, organisations may lack supporters from among citizens. Non-governmental organisations, interest groups, and social movements demanding a popular mandate may thus lack the legitimacy to convince officials and institutions to be taken seriously. They face the risk of becoming 'officers without an army', who moved away from the needs of those whom they represented (Petrova – Tarrow, 2007: 88).

There is another issue, often overlooked by scientists, that relates to the questionable (or so far theoretically little grasped) practical impact of transactional activism. Transactional mobilisation may not only facilitate the development of an organisation or social movement, but it may also limit it. These limitations may be caused by the width and heterogeneity of the coalition in a situation where the participatory activism resources are weak. Transactions between heterogeneous groups may lead to disintegration dynamics within the movement. Such dynamics often depends on the degree of ideological polarisation between different groups within a coalition. Transactional activism thus has the potential to bring a diversity resources to movements, as well as limit their further mobilisation (Dutchak, 2009: 51).

The problematic character of the widespread theoretical argument on the compensation effect of transactional activism in the case of organisations with a lack of resources is reflected in the fact that this view largely focuses on one side of emerging transactions. However, there are (minimum) two sides behind any cooperation or coalition. The weakness of the theoretical approach to transactional activism is when it theoretically explains and justifies emerging transactions only from the perspective of one cooperating side and pays much less attention to the other side. If organisation 'A' has a low strategic capacity or a lack of resources to accomplish its goal, and therefore decides to enter cooperation with organisation 'B', it is important to focus at the theoretical level also on the position of organisation 'B'. If the newly established cooperation

is to be a compensation for the low costs of organisation 'A', organisation 'B' may (though not necessarily) dispose of more resources and a higher strategic capacity. However, the prevailing theoretical perspective does not pay sufficient attention to its position, although it is two sides of the same coin. For a more comprehensive grasping of transactional activism, it is also important to focus on organisation 'B' in this hypothetical model. What are its motivations to enter this kind of cooperation? What are the organisation's costs associated with this transaction and the resulting benefits? I would like to add self-critically that this point of criticism can be partly applied to my research, since I focus analytically on transactional activism from the position of a specific organisation – the Cvernovka Foundation. Even so, its position changes depending on the specific type of cooperation and my analysis suggests that transactional activism may be a preferred strategy of achieving goals even for organisations with a relatively high strategic capacity and access to various types of resources. Even this case is characterised by a reduction of costs or by increasing the effectiveness of the use of the organisation's resources and strategic capacity in its effort to fulfil its objectives in the field of civic activism.

We should not forget about the possible scenario where one organisation contacts another one with an offer for cooperation, but the latter refuses such offer. Such cases are difficult to study, as their result is not a transaction, i.e. practical manifestation that can be observed and analysed scientifically. This scenario can easily escape scientists' attention. To obtain a comprehensive picture and a more complex theoretical understanding of transactional activism, it may be useful to consider this scenario as well and explore the reasons, motivations, and strategies of the organisations that refused to enter an offered cooperation.

## CONCLUSION

The main goal of this publication was to explore and interpret the manifestations of civic activism in connection with the functioning of Nová Cvernovka in Bratislava. Nová Cvernovka represents an example of a cultural and creative centre that brings together a considerable human potential, translating it into creative, cultural, artistic, and activist activities. With respect to the centre's activities, I focused on transactional activism. I analysed examples of cooperation in the Cvernovka Foundation's civic participation and explained why this strategy is characteristic of the studied organisation. I looked at the findings of my qualitative research through the lens of theoretical literature on urban social movements and civic activism in Central and Eastern Europe and the theoretical concept of transactional activism. The scientific works by Jacobsson, Petrova and Tarrow, Bitušíková, Císař (and others) offer a suitable theoretical framework for grasping this topic, as they not only describe the manifestations of civic activism typical of this region, but they also analyse, interpret, and put them into a broader context with the social and political development of post-socialist countries and with the specificities of their urban environment.

The book can also be understood as a case study of Nová Cvernovka, a cultural and creative centre situated in Bratislava. The centre was created fifteen years ago in the original premises of the former thread- and yarn-making factory, which gave rise to a relatively closed community of artists and creatives because of lower rent and attractiveness of the premises. In 2016, the tenants were forced to leave these spaces and, thanks to their cooperation with the Bratislava Self-Governing Region, they moved to their current place – the complex of the former Secondary Chemical Vocational School at Račianska Street. Under the name Nová Cvernovka, this place became an important cultural and social centre in Bratislava and began to be increasingly active also in the field of civic activism.

The book also contains a detailed description of the story of Cvernovka, without which it is impossible to understand the current functioning of this centre. Because of the diversity of its activities and development, the book addresses a broad spectrum of topics, such as creative industry issues, support and financing of cultural and creative centres, protection of industrial heritage, revitalisation of unused buildings, or the eventisation of culture in the city. Independent and comprehensive research on the outlined particular topics can contribute to the production of valuable scientific works in different scientific disciplines. In addition, these topics are important also from the point of view

of the applicability of the findings in practice, with an overlap to the areas of independent culture as well as cultural and creative centres. Little is known about these spheres in Slovakia. Experts, scientists, and political actors often look at cultural and creative centres through the lens of development concepts related to creativity. They thus refer to the attractiveness of these approaches and to the global trend of their application in practice. The main theses of the creative industry and creative cities concept prefer focus on the economic effect of these centres. It is important, though, to focus also on their social influence which is considerable in Slovakia and is also manifested by engagement in a broad spectrum of civic activism. The presentation and analysis of Nová Cvernovka's activist work is the principal theme of my book. I offer the findings from my research conducted in 2017–2019 using qualitative methods. Five types of civic activism characteristic of Cvernovka's activities resulted from this research. The first of them includes public mobilisation by Cvernovka, and is manifested by (1) a natural and organic response by the population to events related to Cvernovka (in particular the demolition of some buildings within the complex in 2012), and (2) conscious mobilisation of people by Cvernovka (crowdfunding campaigns, organisation of voluntary work during the reconstruction, and participatory planning of the future form of the centre). In public mobilisation processes, the media coverage of specific events and Cvernovka's story itself was an important factor, tackling also issues related to the demolition of industrial heritage sites, often reflected during that period. According to Jacobsson (2015a; 2015b; Jacobsson – Korolczuk, 2019), this type of 'bottom-up' urban participation is characteristic of the Central and Eastern European region and was often ignored during the research on civic activism in the region after the fall of socialism.

The second identified type of activism is cooperation with other entities in the raising of awareness about the functioning of cultural and creative centres. In connection with these manifestations, the term 'trust-building' was often used in interviews during my research. This is related to the low level of general trust in collective action and disillusion about political authorities, which are typical features of post-socialist countries (Jacobsson 2015b). However, mistrust can be observed on both sides and is manifested in Slovakia also on the side of public institutions and regional or local authorities versus civic initiatives. To overcome it, the Cvernovka Foundation seeks to show a positive example of partnerships mainly between the non-profit sector and the regional or local authorities.

Cvernovka's civic participation is characterised, among other things, by responding to current social and political events. The most important examples are the activities of Nová Cvernovka related to the murder of Ján Kuciak and Martina Kušnírová in the spring of 2018. The community of this cultural and creative centre was active also during the protests *For a Decent Slovakia*, which represent an example of quite rare episodic mass mobilisations in the region (Čísař, 2013c). We should also mention Cvernovka's engagement in the civic

platforms *We Stand by Culture* and *Let's Not Waste Time*. These initiatives display features of transactional activism, being an example of cooperation between cultural and educational institutions and civic initiatives.

Nová Cvernovka is active also in the field of public education and awareness-raising. These have the form of exhibitions on the anniversaries of important events at the entrance area of the building and related educational activities for secondary school students. The educational dimension of the programme organised in Nová Cvernovka, either centrally or at the level of individual tenants, is also essential. These lectures and workshops reflect on many issues, such as science, development and the history of Bratislava, environmental sustainability, personal development, protection of industrial architecture, etc. The manifestations of educational activism in Nová Cvernovka are characterised by a combination of the art and culture spheres with education.

The fifth type of civic activism relates to the raising and practical application of new topics and concepts which are not yet common and widespread in Slovakia. These include various aspects of a slow and sustainable life style, environmental sustainability and green building innovations, operation of a community garden and social housing based on the *housing first* principle, and relate to the concept of progressive modernism (Jacobsson, 2015b) which involves a tendency to modern approaches, the rejection of some parts of the socialist past and the seeking of a position in Europe and in the relationship to the 'West'. Citizens' awareness about global issues thanks to the media and the internet as well as the experience of predominantly young active citizens gained abroad are also important in this regard, which is manifested by the frequent application of global concepts to the local context of the region (Bitušíková, 2015b).

In all described categories of civic activism in Nová Cvernovka, we can identify a considerable presence of cooperation and links of the Cvernovka Foundation with other actors – the non-governmental sector, regional and local authorities, educational institutions, the media, and the public. Their action repertoire consists mainly of cooperation in organising events, the creation of common platforms, civic initiatives and petitions, the influencing of public policies, and the conditions of functioning of cultural and creative centres drawing on the knowledge and experience of the Cvernovka Foundation, a pro-active approach towards the media in an effort to obtain public support, and crowdfunding campaigns. These findings led me to an analysis of these manifestations and of the Foundation itself based on the theoretical concept of transactional activism.

The analysis revealed a relatively strong strategic capacity of the Cvernovka Foundation mainly in the field of social networks and organisational structure. The strategic capacity also involves an analysis of resources, showing a considerable presence of cultural, human, social and organisational ones. Although some manifestations of the Cvernovka Foundation's transactional activism aim to compensate for missing resources, it is more common for transactional activism

to be motivated by the strategic capacity of the organisation and the existence of some resources which, by reducing the costs of establishing cooperation, give rise to transactional activism. And this, in turn, may contribute to increasing effectiveness when it comes to achieving the objectives of specific manifestations of civic activism as one of the essential reasons for the Cvernovka Foundation to enter various types of cooperation. Several manifestations examined suggest that transactional activism may also lead to the mobilisation of people, especially when it reflects on current political, social, or environmental issues. These findings thus broaden the researchers' often valid view of transactional activism as a way of compensation for the lack of resources or the inability to mobilise people (Císař, 2008, 2013a, 2013b; Petrova – Tarrow, 2007).

This scientific monograph explores the manifestations of civic activism that are associated with a particular type of organisation and therefore do not represent the full range of civic participation in the Central and Eastern European region. The book focuses primarily on transactional activism, grasping it from a broader perspective, as many theoretical works include in this category primarily the manifestations of political activism. However, civic participation and urban social movements raise a wide spectrum of topics relevant to the research on urban ethnology and other scientific disciplines. Jacobsson and Korolczuk (2019) have identified several issues as key areas for further research. What characteristics and manifestations of activism are caused by daily problems and people's meetings in urban premises? How (and if at all) are changes reflected at the individual level, e.g. redefinition of the sources of a problem, into actual engagement and collective action? What is the relationship between informal activism, membership in non-governmental organisations, and involvement in social movements?

The reasons, circumstances, and the mechanisms of cooperation within civil society remain a relatively little explored area. I believe that by applying the theoretical concept of transactional activism to the functioning of a particular cultural and creative centre, this book will contribute to the knowledge and conceptualisation of this topic, especially in the post-socialist context of Central and Eastern Europe. Cultural and creative centres in Slovakia have proven to be an appropriate field for the research on transactional activism, being active also within civil society and in getting together with various entities. In addition, their activities reflect many current trends in Central and Eastern European activism, indicating a paradigmatic shift and gradual weakening of the influence of socialism – such as the reflection on new concepts, the tendency to promote ecological and environmental issues, and the application of global approaches to the local environment.

# PHOTOGRAPHIES



Photo 1: Nová Cvernovka Cultural and Creative Centre © Ivana Csalová



Photo 2: The main entrance to the studios of Nová Cvernovka © Ivana Csalová

PHOTOGRAPHIES



Photo 3: „To experience? To dance? To vaccinate.“ © Ivana Csalová



Photo 4: A shop and showroom of children's clothing brand „Mile“ © Ivana Csalová



Photo 5: Part of the community garden behind the buildings of Nová Cvernovka © Ivana Csalová



Photo 6: The corridors of Nová Cvernovka I. © Ivana Csalová



Photo 7: „If we survive this, we will survive everything“ © Ivana Csalová



Photo 8: The outdoor area of Nová Cvernovka called Park de Palma © Ivana Csalová



Photo 9: The outdoor venue for concerts and film screenings © Ivana Csalová



Photo 10: The entrance to the bar © Ivana Csalová

PHOTOGRAPHIES



Photo 11: The corridors of Nová Cvernovka II. © Ivana Csalová



Photo 12: A playground in Park de Palma © Ivana Csalová



Photo 13: Art installation of the harpsichord, which was saved from the demolished Park of Culture and Leisure in 2011 © Ivana Csalová



Photo 14: The ArtAttack shop selling art products (also) of Nová Cvernovka's tenants © Ivana Csalová

PHOTOGRAPHIES



Photo 15: A canteen in Nová Cvernovka called „Twelve souls“ © Ivana Csalová



Photo 16: Art installation at the former dormitory building © Ivana Csalová

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