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# THE STORY OF BRATISLAVA

from the Beginning of the 20th Century



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Tourist brochures and other forms of informative publications, as well as comments by foreign visitors guides are based mainly on historians' works. They describe the political development, important events, interesting buildings and their stories, people who create their works in the city, visited the place, or made the city famous, including repressions against its population, or economic growth and importance of the city. After all, there is a plenty of topics to be presented. What I offer is archived documents, memories of the actors, contemporary press, and people's statements made during my research, verified also by personal knowledge or experience. The following stories particularly concern the life of the city's residents.

## INTRODUCTION

The ancient city of Pressburg, officially called Pozsony in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the city of coronation of nineteen Austrian Monarchy rulers as Hungarian kings, received its Slovak name Bratislava in 1919. It is the beginning of the period we want to take the reader through: The turbulent years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the transition towards the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, during which the problematic social processes after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 subsided. The brief overview in the introductory part describes the key stages in the development of the city from its incorporation into the Czechoslovak State until today.

The renaming of the city was shocking for the local population, since Hungarian and German inhabitants prevailed both quantitatively and politically until the end of World War I (83% in total in 1910), considering and identifying themselves as native and autochthonous. They imagined their future in the new Hungarian state and to a lesser degree in Austria. Slovaks represented an approximately 15% minority with little social and political significance. Czechs also lived here but represented only a marginal component. Why then in the Czechoslovak state and with a new name?

The city was multi-cultural at that time, with members of several other nationalities. Jews (around 10% of the population) had a specific position. They derived their identity mainly from their religious affiliation and considered their ethnic distinctiveness to be secondary. They pragmatically preferred loyalty towards the ruling social system and claimed to be a constituent population

group (along with the German and Hungarian and later also Slovak or Czechoslovak nationality).

After the split of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the establishment of the Czecho-Slovak Republic (1918), confirmed by the Trianon Peace Treaty (1920), a new era of the Danube city began. In the period of establishment of new political and social conditions and with the arrival of almost 30,000 Czechs and Slovaks to the city right during the first years of the republic (1919–1920), the function of ethnicity as a transformation agent that had dismantled the traditional hierarchy of personal as well as collective identities was fully manifested. The changed circumstances caused the reinterpretation of the unspecified identity which was widespread among the residents and originated from the multi-cultural local patriotism (called also 'kraxelhuber'). The social changes resulted in increased ethnic awareness of the individual population groups, which was also accompanied by various ethnic problems and demands in all areas of the political, economic, cultural, and social life.

The 1930s were a lucky stage in the development of the city in the aftermath of the economic crisis. The democratic conditions of the inter-war republic ensured equal civil rights to national communities. The city experienced economic development, population growth, and, as remembered by the witnesses, free social conditions based on ethnic tolerance.

The political decisions after the declaration of the Slovak country yet within the common republic and the subsequent establishment of the independent Slovak Republic (1939–1945) meant a fundamental change in the development of the city. The systematic nationalist policy of the new state was accompanied by anti-Czech regulations and anti-Jewish repressions, which resulted in the mass transportation of Jews to concentration camps and the social confinement of Czechs as unwanted citizens along with

the forced leaving of most of them. Only a few Jewish citizens and a part of Czech families returned to Bratislava after the war. In the renewed republic, they again claimed to be Czechs and Czechoslovaks; however, in the period of the city's growth and strengthening of its Slovak character, their positions and influence in the city significantly weakened. During the Communist regime stage, the national demands of ethnic communities were ideologically unacceptable, and, in social life, national disputes occurred only marginally or only in the form of individual reactions.

In the 1950s and partly in the 1960s, the inhabitants of the city lived under the violently enforced Communist ideology in the life of society. The population of Czechoslovak cities had to cope with and adapt to the instruments of the new regime such as cancellation or limitation of private ownership, the expropriation of real estates and land, the subordination of self-governing regions to party bureaucracy, centralised and ideologically influenced decision-making on the development of society, the preferring of worker cadres and professions, marginalisation of the intelligentsia, trials and criminal penalties for 'enemies of the regime'. Since the coup in 1948, the liquidation of higher social classes (bourgeoisie) and small producers (petty bourgeoisie and self-employed farmers) began, introducing targeted destructive pressure on rich townspeople as the main representatives of the middle classes and on their economic fundamentals and housing. The eviction of the unreliable middle classes from the ranks of the bourgeoisie and the moving in of reliable Communist cadres (functionaries and officials) resulted in the emergence of new elites of proletarian origin. These and many other changes affected the entire republic, Bratislava being only an example in this process.

The economic and social transformation after 1989 produced fundamental changes within the unified space of the socialist city. In the city centre, the local authorities and owners of buildings

focused on the renovation of historical spaces and buildings, thus restoring their characteristic visual identity. There were efforts to also renew the demolished city districts based on the original projects. The functional use of buildings and public spaces underwent significant changes. The Old Town is marked by commercial interests and tourism, which changed not only the multi-functional structure of shops, services, working and rest areas during the earlier half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also the unified functions of this space during socialism. The Old Town management quietly successfully attempted to revitalise the urban or city life in public spaces; however, what lacked here was live local population with all the manifestations of daily life. More solvent population groups moved to the more luxurious parts of the city. High rent and, hence, incomes from the ownership of buildings in the Old Town were only possible for businesses, which led to population reduction. The city faced a stage of fundamental social and spatial changes accompanied by massive construction of new buildings.

We shall summarise this introductory overview stating that each political regime that changed after around twenty years modified not only the ethnic and social profile of the city, but also its urbanist and architectural characteristics as well as the appearance and character of the city. The next chapters describe the unique stories of these periods.

## **THE STORY OF THE CITY'S INCORPORATION INTO THE CZECHO-SLOVAK STATE**

The new state formation – the Czecho-Slovak State – was established on 28 October 1918, and it was the first official name of the republic which later changed to the Czechoslovak Republic or Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, the integration of the city into the new state was complicated. On 29 December 1918, the Czecho-slovak government issued an order to occupy Slovakia up to the

demarcation line, this being the Danube River. The task to occupy the city was entrusted to Italian colonel Ricardo Barecca and his 33<sup>rd</sup> Czechoslovak regiment (Italian legionaries) and to colonel Schöbl's group. When the so-called City Committee saw that the occupation was irreversible, the Hungarian troops began retreating, backed only by several officers and voluntaries. In the night from 31 December to 1 January 1919, the main railway station was occupied. On New Year's afternoon, the commander of the Czechoslovak troops sent a message that the troops would start the march. The city was therefore expected to send its representatives to arrange the details in order to avoid a military intervention. However, both Hungarian soldiers and civilians committed looting of shops. They were disarmed and nineteen people were shot. Immediately during the first days after the occupation of the city, Pressburg citizens calmed down because, according to a contemporary testimony, they saw the Czechoslovak troops restoring security and order.

The military attack on Pressburg was successful; this time, it was necessary to take political control over the city. Evangelical priest Samuel Zoch had been appointed Pressburg County governor already in mid-December, but he took office only after the occupation of the city. He also became the city's government commissioner. The decrees and regulations that he issued after taking office did not please the old Pressburg citizens. He dissolved the county assembly, the representative city council, and municipal committees, all foreigners without a job had to move out, the sale and distribution of Hungarian and later also Austrian newspapers was prohibited, etc. The strained relations are illustrated by the content of the Pressburg Military Command's decrees for the city residents, according to which they were required, under the threat of a military trial, to "avoid any expressions of violence and acts that may impair public order", warn about "the instigation of im-

pure elements”, the spread of “false reports of the resistance and civic uprising”, the intimidation of citizens, attempts to cause “disorders among the population”, “false or exaggerated reporting to the detriment of the reputation and honour of the troops which occupied the Slovak land”.<sup>43</sup>

In this unfavourable atmosphere, the official welcoming of the so-called Slovak government was being prepared. The decision to transfer its seat related to the government decree of 18 January 1919 by which Pressburg was declared the capital city of Slovakia. The representatives of the Prague government and several guests also announced their attendance of the official arrival of the minister for the administration of Slovakia, Vavro Šrobár, with a group of officers (so-called Slovak Government). His arrival was scheduled on 4 February. The situation deteriorated after the dissolution of the university senate. In this context, county governor Samuel Zoch wrote that, despite the accommodating agreement on further teaching in Hungarian language, including for students from the Hungarian territory, and the promise to act loyally, the senate refused to participate at the official welcoming ceremony because of incompatibility with their Hungarian patriotic sentiment.

The situation was dangerous also because a major part of the Czechoslovak troops had been relocated to the conflict Czech-Polish bordering region (Cieszyn Silesia) and the county governor was afraid of riots. He therefore turned to the Czech Lands for help. He requested Sokol battalions to be sent to ensure order. It was Sunday when he wrote the request; however, immediately in the afternoon of the next day, over two thousand Sokol members boarded the trains to arrive at Pressburg by early morning on Tuesday. However, they were directed by an Italian commander to go to the unheated barracks outside the city, where they were waiting without food for six hours. The county governor who had

invited them had to help them. The Italian command had lost the confidence of the county governor and of Czechoslovak soldiers earlier because they had been informed about their friendly contacts with the Hungarian nobility. Particularly known for this was the Pressburg commander-in-chief, colonel Barecca.

A strike was declared before the announced transfer of the so-called Slovak government from Žilina to Pressburg and the official political take-over of the administration of Slovakia. The first thing the striking railway workers did was to break the electrical wiring of the Bratislava railway station. By damaging the equipment and the absence of workers, they aimed to make travelling by train impossible. Had it not been for Czech support, their plan would have succeeded.

With the relocation of the government, the middle classes felt to be offended in national terms. Under the supervision of the army and Czech volunteers (from Sokol organisation), the government was only welcomed by the representatives and supporters of the new republic, including several ministers of the Prague government, diplomats, and military representatives of the allied powers, the officialdom, people's representatives in folk costumes from all over Slovakia, the National Theatre ensemble from Prague, as well as Slovaks living in the city and its surroundings. The city was decorated with Slovak and Czech flags, a large glory gate was installed at Štefánikova Street, official speeches were given, followed by a military parade, Czech opera performances (*The Bartered Bride* and *Dalibor*) in the City Theatre, people's gatherings, military music concerts, as well as other ceremonial events that lasted until the late evening. A contemporary summed up the significance of this day by saying that we officially buried Pozsony on that day.

The unwillingness of the Hungarian and German representatives to attend the welcoming of the Czechoslovak government had some consequences. The Ministry of National Defence, led by

Václav Klofáč, issued the following ordinance: “The unfortunate experience of the last few days in Slovakia and, in particular, the Pressburg case (the official entry of Dr. Šrobár’s Slovak government in Pressburg was thwarted by passive resistance and a strike by Hungarian officials and commissionaires, who were left in the service of the Czechoslovak Republic for the time being) require the immediate replacement of all Hungarian officers, officials and soldiers who are still in our services... Considering the importance of this necessity, it must not be pointed out, as before, that there are no Czechoslovak personnel to replace the Hungarians. I admit that it is difficult to take the experienced staff from Bohemia and Moravia; however, our vital interests in Slovakia require us to send all the necessary personnel to Slovakia as quickly as possible, even if it is to the detriment of the service in Bohemia and Moravia.”<sup>48</sup> It was a signal for a later mass transfer of Czech workers to Slovakia and especially to Pressburg.

The take-over of political control over the city went seemingly without major problems. Nevertheless, everything was different after a few days. The railwaymen at the main station destroyed whatever they could, including locomotives which they heated up and then drained. They damaged sixteen locomotives in this way. The opponents of the new state announced a demonstration for 12 February 1919, which was approved by the authorities. It took place at *Tržné námestie* (*Market Square*) in front of the Old Market Hall at today’s SNP Square). Originally, the ‘Memorandum of the City’s Inhabitants’ was to be officially adopted; however, the Hungarian nationalists misused the event. According to the reports, when the crowd chanted *Éljen Magyarország*, colonel Barecca came among them by car. One of the onlooking legionnaires hit him in anger with the butt of his rifle. He appeared to realise that he actually came to support the gathering. There was a fight and shooting between the participants and Czechoslovak soldiers that

had come from the barracks, with eight killed, 29 heavily and 63 lightly wounded. Colonel Barecca was transferred back to Italy. The chief commander was also recalled, and French general Eugène Mittelhauser was appointed the new army chief.

The essence of public resistance can be found in the text of the Memorandum, which summarises the necessary as well as non-acceptable actions of the new power – the decree on change of the official language, the dismissal of civil servants, the requirement to swear an oath of allegiance to the republic, the restriction of the freedom of speech, the closing of a university, the internment of the university representatives and the working class, interference with private property, the causing of scarcity and expensive prices, and some other.

### STORY OF RENAMING THE CITY

Before the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Bratislava was called Pressburg, Pozsony, and Prešporok. According to historians, the oldest known name of the city is Wratislaurgium after Prince Vratislav (805–807) and, according to historical sources from the 9<sup>th</sup> century, also Breslava. The forward military settlement on the present-day territory of the city, forming part of the Roman garrison Gerulata on the opposite bank of the Danube River, originally had the Latin name Pisonium. The name of the city Pozsony, used in Hungary until today, thus also has a historical reason. From Greek sources we also know about the name Istropolis. The German name Pressburg derives from the ancient name Brezalauspurc (907) and represents its modified form in German-speaking countries. It also resonates in Paris, where one of the streets leading to the Arc de Triomphe bears the name Rue de Presburg as a tribute to the signing of the victorious treaty between the Napoleonic Empire and the Austrian Monarchy (1805) after the Battle of Slavkov. The name Prešporok is a lingu-

istic modification created by the Slovak environment. The city in close contact with three different ethnic and linguistic areas was naturally multi-ethnic, with different toponymy.

The city was occupied by the Czechoslovak troops on 1 January 1919. The change of the name was to symbolise its belonging to the Slovak part of the republic. The names used during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Pressburg (German), Pozsony (Hungarian), and Prešporok/Prešpurek (Slovak), were changed to Bratislava by a government decree of 16 March 1919. They did not prefer the Slovak version of the original name (e.g., Prešporok), but chose the old-new name that reflected the Slovak origins of the city. The renaming of the town by a government decree is an example of intolerance to the domestic population, as well as mythisation of the ‘Slavic history of the city’. It was based on the historical names of the not exactly localised castle of Brezalauspurc and Braslawespurc (907), which refer to the Slavic prince Braslav. It was apparently in this context that the name was created during the national revival period, reminding that the predominantly German city in the Hungarian state has a Slavic past. It appeared for the first time on the pages of the Nitra almanac (1842) and remained known thanks to a song from that period: “*Bratislava, Bratislava, tam zapadla Slávov sláva...*” (“*Bratislava, Bratislava, that is where the Slavs’ glory was buried*”). The text refers to the battle under the Brezalauspurc Castle in 907 between the old Hungarians and the Bavarians (and probably also Slovenes). Under the new name, the city as a whole was to also become the place of national memory.

### STORY OF A MULTI-CULTURAL CITY

The Czechs in Slovakia were not a national minority in the republic but, as a purposefully politically created Czechoslovak nation, a majority nation of the First Republic. In Bratislava,

the claiming of this identity was important both for Czechs and Slovaks. During the Monarchy era, Slovaks formed only around 15% of the city's population – against 42% Germans and 40% Hungarians (1910 census). At that time, Slovaks were only a marginalised minority and 'Magyarhood' was the only politically and socially accepted option (with all consequences). The occupation of the city by the Czechoslovak troops and the take-over of its administration at the beginning of 1919 caused a major demographic change. The numerous Hungarian troops and officials were leaving, and the immigration of Slovaks and Czechs began. In addition, the 1921 census showed a major tendency towards Slovak origins, revaluation of identities, etc. As a result, Czechs and Slovaks formed up to a 42% national population group in the city in the course of two years. The German-Hungarian community, which still stucked together, was still in majority (53%; Germans 29%, and Hungarians 24%).

What was the cause of this organised way of social engineering? During the first stage, they replaced not only the members of the army and the gendarmerie, but also staff in higher functions who were important for the state, officials, teachers, railwaymen, postmen, etc. It was important to fill with their own people mainly the positions that required secondary or a higher level of education, which related to the general statement that there was an absolute lack of intelligentsia in Slovakia. It should be stated that Slovakia's problem was the absence of Czechoslovak-minded, linguistically competent intelligentsia loyal to the new republic. Even though these offices, courts, schools, hospitals, etc. worked well during the monarchy, these positions in Slovakia were usually held by Hungarians or Magyarons.<sup>1</sup> For instance, out of the 52 pre-coup judges, only six spoke good Slovak (Jirásek 1947: 48).

Such staff were considered incompetent, and without Czech support they could not be replaced. Sociologist Anton Štefánek

pointed out this fact when recalling the merits of Vavro Šrobár: “He made sure that only Slovaks or Czechs loyal to the republic get into office”, adding that “he rightly did not trust the Magyarised Slovaks” (Štefánek, 1937: 460).

Despite such lack of staff, the employment of Czechs in Slovakia was from the beginning perceived contradictorily – either positively or critically. Historian J. Rychlík described the coming of Czechs to Slovakia as follows: “On the one hand, it is undoubtful that Slovakia would not have done without the Czech intelligentsia; on the other hand, it should be admitted that the Czechoslovak government sent to Slovakia also people whom Slovaks did not need” (Rychlík, 1989: 404). Their help was particularly appreciated (across the entire political spectrum) during the most difficult first years of the republic, when it was necessary to replace almost the entire state administration and to immediately change the school system.

The presence and employment of Czechs became a political problem during the Great Depression period. In our country, it was fully manifested a little later – the year 1931 is usually mentioned. Despite the high unemployment rate, the Czechoslovak government continued placing Czech employees in Slovakia. Slovakia was qualified as the agricultural reservoir of the republic, which led to the slow-down of industrial development, the shut-down of several production enterprises, difficulty in sales for sole traders, and workers’ unemployment. The dismissed agricultural workers headed to towns, but there was no work. Poverty and unemployment were spreading (Lupták 2000: 119-121). The Slovak People’s Party launched harsh anti-government propaganda against the employment and prioritisation of Czech applicants and, instead, requested the preferential admission of Slovaks, an autonomous arrangement of the republic, and the gradual leaving of Czechs.

The new generation of the Slovak intelligentsia was raised by the Czechoslovak school system at the beginning of the 1930s. Trust in the Czechoslovak unity disappeared when seeking a job: “The young intelligentsia found the doors closed everywhere, and the reply to their job applications was: “Cannot be upheld.”<sup>2</sup> Josef Jirásek remembers that employing the young Slovak intelligentsia was a big problem during the crisis period. Most leading positions were held by Czechs, and the ambitious Slovak applicants considered it a barrier to succeeding. According to him, it was in this context that the slogan “All Czechs, get away!” appeared (Jirásek 1947: 101).

The main problem during and after the economic crisis, which led to recurrent Czech-Slovak disputes, was the employment of Czech workers in Slovakia based on decisions issued in Prague. However, at the beginning of the 1930s, there was already an educated Slovak generation which did not support the Czechoslovak national unit concept. Moreover, it felt lost when looking for a job. Most leading positions were held by Czechs, which ambitious Slovak applicants saw as a big obstacle. The political reason for the anti-Czech campaign in Slovakia was the ‘Prague centralism’, which was a concise term for the way of managing the state, the economic strategy, personnel policy, and the resulting unwillingness of the Czech political forces to recognise Slovakia’s right to autonomy. On the other hand, there was an argument to which American Slovaks contributed in a way. At the overcrowded largest square in Bratislava in 1938, the original document of the Pittsburgh Agreement from the year 1918 was shown in the presence of the strongest, nationally oriented party of Andrej Hlinka, in which the future president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk had confirmed the promise to grant Slovakia an autonomous status.<sup>3</sup> Under the propagandistically as well as socially adverse situation, many Czechs decided to leave Slovakia. According to

the 1930 and 1938 censuses, up to 44,200 and, respectively, 28,000 Czechs left Slovakia.<sup>4</sup>

The Ludaks (national party) started the year 1938 with the slogan: “V novom roku do útoku!” (“Attack in the new year!”). The aim was to use the strained national situation in the republic to achieve autonomy. In the same year, several public gatherings took place in Bratislava in support of the Czechoslovak idea, but also in favour of the autonomy. The perspective of autonomy gained support also in Bratislava, where the People’s Party had never had strong positions.<sup>5</sup>

The political agreements after the occupation of the Czech bordering region by Germany and Poland led to declaring the autonomy of the Slovak Land (6 October 1938). The main topic of the internal policy of Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party (HSLS) was “cleansing of undesirable elements” or a “solution to the Czech and Jewish question”. Fast solutions were expected, expressed by the slogans “Out with the Czechs”.

The displacement of the Czechs working in state and public services was carried out in an organised way under the so-called ‘State Removal Action’. As of 30 June 1939, 17,763 civil servants (around 50,000 persons when counted with families) were forced to leave Slovakia, and another 933 a year later. In 1941, the agreed number was reduced by half, because the Slovak government did not dispose of an adequate replacement. However, the number of employees working in the private sector (clerks, factory and agricultural workers), self-employed craftsmen, traders, businessmen, doctors, lawyers, etc. grew, who stated various obstacles to their further working in Slovakia, such as expulsion from the place of their residence, withdrawal of their trade licence, prohibition of employment, etc. They were not part of the organised removal and left ‘voluntarily’ under coercion (Šisler 1989: 234, 236). Through several legislative amendments and tricks, the government attem-

pted to take over control over Czech enterprises and the entire private sphere (Rychlík, 1989).

The removal of civil servants of Czech nationality took place until 1944 and, in 1945, only 542 people remained in the state services in Slovakia (Šisler, 1989: 232, 236). However, the statistics contain no records about freelancers, entrepreneurs, self-employed people, corporate employees, etc. From once a dominant position, the Czechs in Slovakia gradually became a segregated group that had to endure the opinions of the new majority or the ruling party.

The totalitarian regime, which was officially established in autumn 1938, influenced the development of Slovak towns by ideologically oriented interventions into the structure of society and social relations. This discontinuous development was caused by state dirigisme, the restriction of civil liberties, the restriction of the rights of selected population groups, and the favouring of others (political, ethnic, confessional, economic). During the period of the wartime Slovak State and the later republic, the eviction and deportation of the Czech and Jewish inhabitants took place. Slovak and, in particular, German citizens from the surroundings moved into their flats in Podhradie (area under the castle hill) and elsewhere (Kovačevičová 1987: 273).

The natural and socially accepted influence of the rich townspeople within the city community was restricted by abolishing non-Ludak political parties, local self-governing bodies, social and interest organisations. The new elites consisting of ruling political and police elites and HSLS paramilitary units, Aryanisers (confiscators of Jewish property), and pro-regime oriented economic circles, the servile Catholic Church, and the intelligentsia, identified themselves socially and isolated themselves, along with creating a different cultural and social profile of the local elites (Lipták 1998). The signs of the totalitarian regime, the police state, and

the military period were also translated into the cultural profile of cities. The public spaces witnessed expressions of a political and national dictate in the form of flag decorations, the renaming of streets, marches of paramilitary units, public citizen bullying, etc.

After the end of the war in 1945, part of the German population moved away voluntarily. Based on the presidential decree, German and Hungarian inhabitants were deprived of their citizenship and many of them (especially Germans) were evicted. This action was organised across the city, but it, certainly, most affected the neighbourhoods in the Old Town and its surroundings, where they formed the dominant ethnic community. In this way, the predominantly German neighbourhoods Zuckerman dl, Vydrice, Židovňa, the wine houses around Suché mýto and Oberufer, which later became Prievoz with a new settlement, were practically depopulated. The flats became occupied by Slovaks and partly also Czechs, as well as Roma whose acculturation was planned to be accelerated (Kovačevičová 1987: 273). The political and social revenge led to a faster assimilation of the rest of the German and urban Hungarian population in the city. These steps marked the beginning of the decline of some parts of the city, ultimately leading to their extinction. The war events changed the common ethnic structure of the city as well as the rules of co-existence between fellow citizens.

The tolerant times under democratic conditions were over. After twenty years (1918–1938) of the development of the city in which people lived freely, a totalitarian regime of one party and one ideology took over. Based on the resettlement agreements with Prague, the Slovak government forced the majority of Czech inhabitants to move out of Bratislava. At the time of handing over the southern territories to Hungary, a part of the Hungarian and Jewish population also left the city. The Jews' concerns about the developments in Slovakia were confirmed by the announcement

of anti-Jewish laws, under which they were first displaced from the city (the eviction of eighty Jewish families took place), later isolated and deported to work camps in Slovakia and to German concentration camps. Only a few of those who survived returned to the city after the war.

The city lost most of its Jewish population. The German inhabitants were first transported to the collection camp in Petržalka and then they had to leave for Austria or Germany. Sooner or later, many of them left indeed. The well-known Jewish area under the castle no longer came to life again. Czech families also returned in small numbers. Based on the Beneš presidential decrees, which attributed collective guilt to all Germans and Hungarians for the war years events, the city lost most of its long-time German inhabitants, and many Hungarians moved away as well. According to one of the witnesses, all those who had somehow survived and had not left preferred becoming Slovaks on the outside: “Germans, Hungarians, and Jews still lived here, however, all of them were Slovaks; they attended Slovak schools and wanted to be Slovaks. Certainly, none of them claimed the Hungarian nationality, let alone the German one.” The national diversity and cultural richness extinguished. The old Pressburg disappeared, and Bratislava definitely became a Slovak city.

## **STORIES OF THE CITY FROM THE COMMUNIST ERA**

The Communist regime considered rich townspeople to be hostile to the Communist ideology and the working class. Since coming to power in 1948, the liquidation of the upper social classes (bourgeoisie), small producers (petty bourgeoisie and self-employed farmers) began, and a targeted destructive pressure on townspeople as the principal representatives of the middle classes and on their economic fundamentals and housing was exerted. The eviction of the unreliable middle classes from the ranks of rich

townspeople to the countryside (Action B) and the moving in of reliable Communist cadres (functionaries and officials) caused the emergence of new elites of proletarian origin.

Changes in the character of the city, its ethnic and social composition, residential complexes, and natural internal borders continued under the Communist regime which, for ideological reasons, liquidated rich townspeople and the middle classes and gradually formed a unified working class. The new, massive construction on the city outskirts was not characterised by any special features that would distinguish one part from the other one. Even though the Old Town lost many of its original functions and the lower social classes, including Roma inhabitants, moved into abandoned houses, it still retained its atmosphere of a promenading, social, and cultural centre.

The new construction began by restoring destroyed sites (Križna Street, Šafárikovo Square, or Záhradnícka Street that had been most affected by bombing). The extensive city construction was planned with post-war enthusiasm, the pre-war building development was evaluated correctly: During the first republic, the city did not have an overall general plan. Modifications were carried out in the form of partial regulations which, though took into account growing traffic demands, often applied the principle of using to the largest extent possible building lands in order to minimise the loss of sites for public purposes. The plans counted with greater use of green areas. These concepts survived February 1948; however, they acquired a new dimension in the Communist propaganda: The five-year plan of socialist construction envisages the elimination of underdeveloped and unhealthy city districts in Bratislava and their replacement with spacious and airy spaces crossing points; Bratislava – primarily a medium-sized old city needs more large open spaces, more green areas, more air.<sup>6</sup> This was not the spirit of modernism, but rather a fast and relatively

cheap solution of how to get rid of historical buildings and small private houses, the restoration of which required large financial costs with a small effect of completed flats. The given era demanded thousands of flats for thousands of 'new builders of Bratislava' who came to the city from all corners of Slovakia.

In the spirit of the modernisation visions, the entire residential arc under the castle complex – from Schloßberg through the historical Jewish municipality (Schloßgrund) up to Vydrica and Zuckerman dl, as well as the wine district around Suché Mýto – was identified as valueless in terms of historical monuments and were demolished. Petržalka was also almost completely demolished. Lands for the construction of a bridge over the Danube River and for a large prefab residential district were thus obtained.

Simultaneously, new city districts on the outskirts of the city were built (Februárového víťazstva, Krasňany, Rača, 500 bytov, Ružinov, Dolné Hony, Podunajské Biskupice, etc.), which can be considered suburbs from the point of view of the meaning of this term, though they did not achieve full amenities and relative independence. When it comes to the differentiation of these new spaces, it should be noted that they received their original cadastral names; however, this unified new construction did not show any special features that would distinguish one part from the other. The names of these areas help localise them but contain minimum special identification signs. The borders between them disappear in continuously developed areas.

The Old Town with a changed population and a changed job structure lost many of its original functions. Nevertheless, it retained the character of a promenading, social, and cultural centre.

In the earlier half of the 1950s, the state authorities' attitude to historical monuments was marked by the Communist ideology. Monuments were considered the former property of the ruling classes which should serve society as a whole, or 'a sad legacy of

capitalism' that had to be brought to an end as soon as possible. And that it was necessary to build on progressive traditions, such as revolutionary and revolutionary movements, as well as on the traditions of the working class (including folk culture). The idea of fast modernisation of society prevailed (*we shall catch up and overtake capitalism*), according to which it was necessary to get rid of all that was old and nonprogressive. In line with this approach to cultural heritage, historical buildings could be used as warehouses without restraints and entire neighbourhoods could be demolished (Bútorá, 2011, s. 164). "Let's walk through the old Bratislava before it is overgrown by the new one," reads a newspaper headline from 1956.

At that time, Slovakia underwent state-controlled industrialisation. The necessary precondition for industrial growth was the mass construction of entire residential districts in order to ensure enough workers for the new-built factories. By means of recruitments, it was necessary to relocate the rural population with labour surplus. While only 32.7% of the total number of flats were built within the residential city districts in 1950–1955, it was 71.3% in the second five-year period and 80.8% in the third one (Rihák, 1966, p. 30), these being mainly prefabricated houses that became the symbol of socialist construction.

The mid-1960s, another, even more massive construction began. The inhabitants of the quiet villages around the city certainly had no idea of what their incorporation into Bratislava (1946) would mean for them. The Riviera pub, the church, the cemetery, and a few houses in the surrounding area remained in Karlova Ves. Dúbravka, Lamač, and partly also Rača were overwhelmed by prefabricated panel residential districts. To facilitate the identification of these, originally rural, settlements, which used to be popular trip destinations for townspeople, the city's inhabitants began using additional names, such as old Lamač or old Dúbrav-

ka. Podunajské Biskupice also have an old and a new part. However, the decision to build the largest residential district Petržalka and connect it to the city by a new bridge over the Danube River at former Rybné námestie (Fish Market Square), sealed the fate of old Petržalka and Podhradie (area under the castle hill), which were almost completely demolished at the end of the 1960s (Bútorá, 2011, p. 153–218).

The post-WWII period, full of plans for the future, including the Communist idea of rebuilding or constructing a ‘new socialist city’, also brought completely new solutions for Bratislava’s development with regard to urban units (neighbourhoods with scattered buildings) and their architectural appearance. The conditions of the architectural competition regarding the Podhradie area, which were prepared by the Central National Committee in Bratislava, states the following as an example: “The conceptual solution should be based on the principles of socialist construction and rebuilding of towns. The new district should become an organic part of the whole city and, together with the castle as the biggest landmark, it will be a true and faithful reflection of the greatness of our building era” (Bútorá, 2011, p. 171). Fortunately, the Podhradie construction projects were not carried out for various reasons.<sup>7</sup> The historical Old Town survived unrenovated for the most part, here and there even demolished. For citizens, the non-existing Podhradie, which formed part of the historic buildings, and the Petržalka prefab residential district became symbols of the socialist period in the development of the city.

The factography contains several stories from the Communist regime period and we shall therefore mention a few examples.

### ***‘Socialist city’***

The representatives and ideologists of the Communist regime, engaged architects and urbanists believed that by eliminating

obsolete buildings and constructing new ones, changing the toponomy, labelling the objects with Communist symbolism, re-educating citizens, and introducing the so-called socialist way of life, they would create a 'socialist city'. In Czechoslovakia, this was possible because of legislative changes, which restricted or abolished the private ownership of lands and urban buildings, allowed investing in the new construction of rental flat buildings only by the state, delegated decision-making powers to central political and state authorities, and introduced central planning with a bureaucratic management of city construction and development. Socialist towns were thus an attempt to create healthy cities for workers and to set rules for their construction and symbolism. According to H. Häußerman, the basic principles of an ideal socialist town included, for instance, suitable spatial arrangement, emphasis placed on the centre, the gathering and celebratory functions of squares, and symbolic value of new and opulent buildings in the centre.<sup>8</sup>

The daily press presented to the public promises of a 'better future' and the rejection of the present as the legacy of the past which, using the propaganda vocabulary, did not meet the needs of a socialist man: "As elsewhere, the capitalists left us a sad legacy in Bratislava. This legacy is being eliminated by building new modern flats for Bratislava workers. And this is how socialist Bratislava is being born, gradually getting rid of everything old and anti-progressive, and with that, our workers are also being reborn."<sup>9</sup> Such attitudes are not rare and confirm that the state authorities' relationship to historical buildings was largely influenced by ideology. These buildings were considered former property of the ruling class that was to serve society as a whole, or the 'sad legacy of capitalism' that must be ended as soon as possible. And it was necessary to build on the 'progressive traditions' such as workers' and revolutionary movements, as well as on the traditions of the

working class. The idea of fast socialist modernisation of society prevailed. In line with this attitude, historical buildings could be used as warehouses without restraints, or entire city districts could have been demolished.<sup>10</sup>

In the first stage, the decision to remove the old buildings referred to Bratislava's Podhradie, which was declared to be valueless in terms of historic monuments. The demolition works were completed at the end of the 1960s in connection with the construction of a new bridge over the Danube River. However, the demolition also affected the wider city centre.

The beginnings of the Communist power were also characterised by changes and the placement of the symbols of the new regime within the public spaces of the city. Political slogans and symbols of the Communist regime (star, hammer and sickle, flags, posters, works of art, commemorative and symbolic objects, statues and portraits of Communist leaders, workers, shock workers, later heroes of socialist work, etc.) that were to shape the look of the 'socialist city' contributed to a significant change of the urban spaces. The imprinting of the new ideology also concerned public life. Along with the introduction of new holidays, the ideological designers also focused on traditional church holidays in order to weaken their impact on society.

However, the idealistic concepts of building a socialist city and shaping a socialist life did not correspond to everyday reality. The concept of the 'ideal socialist city' that meets the needs of a 'socialist man' was only a utopian propaganda. The education of a 'socialist man' was part of the ideological dictate of the regime and failed to meet its targets. The 'socialist way of life' was also just a vague, unspecified vision. The myths of the harmful development of the city under capitalism and of an ideal socialist city fell in proportion to the popularity of the Communist regime.

Even though censorship interfered with media content, some

contemporary reports have been preserved, describing what everyday life in the city looked like. The article by a trade commissioner from 1956 titled 'Surprises on the Christmas Market' suggests what the state of supplies and services in the city was, especially during the preferred Christmas period. The article promises novelties in food supplies (sufficient domestic fruits, raw Christmas sausage, brain salami, gift baskets with Chinese tea and special ground coffee), new industrial goods items to be imported from the Soviet Union and from people's democratic republics<sup>11</sup>, with an addition that the import would not be unlimited and that the demand for these goods would not be sufficiently met. The article assures that the shops will be clean, with good service, cordiality, and courtesy. At that moment, such promises only indirectly point to scarce goods; nevertheless, it is directly listed in the next sentence: "This year, there will be no shortage of purely Christmas goods in Bratislava, such as Christmas candies, Christmas collections, dried fruits, Christmas decorations, electric candles, Christmas tree stands, tinfoil, paper for chocolate truffles (salónky), greeting cards, and photo-postcards."<sup>12</sup>

An article from the most widely read newspaper, *Večerník*, from 1957 is also insightful: "What kind of people we, Bratislava citizens, are that we are unable to grow in ourselves true and active love for our city? These few thoughts come to my mind whenever I walk around the dirty city during these nice sunny days, look at devastated parks, dirty porches and entrance rooms, when I sweat in the unclean carriages of the means of transport and listen to the quarrelling of people and conductors, when I stumble over dug-up streets (in the past, there would always be someone held strictly responsible for that), see the irresponsible frolicking of children on bikes on the streets and sidewalks, their football matches in the middle of streets, torn telephone booths, the people who see the city and enjoy it, but do not sympathise with it and give nothing to

it.<sup>13</sup> With the disproportionate growth of the city, the alienation of new residents is pointed out.

It was a period of scarcity and poor supplies. In 1956 and 1957, it was stated that “there will be no bread because there are no cars”, “flour is bad and yeast is even worst”, there was a lack of bulbs, paper, pins, photopaper, brooms, etc. Trade plans for the year 1956: “there will be no shortage of building material”, “not even the biggest crowds (of people) will threaten television stores”, “there will be more cars, washing machines, and televisions”, “ask your relatives in the village for onions”, “let’s prefer wine to rum”, etc.

### ***Stories of socialist city modelling***

The beginnings of the Communist power were also characterised by changes and the placement of the symbols of the new regime within the public spaces of the city. They were considered important places of ideological influence. In 1949, Stalin’s statue was installed at the central square which was named after him already in 1945 (Hlinkovo námestie/Hlinka Square before<sup>14</sup>). The first phase of the renaming of city squares and streets took place before 1950; politically improper or even quite harmless names were removed to give way to names reminding people of the new state ideology and political power. Námestie Slobody (Freedom Square) became Gottwaldovo námestie (Gottwald Square), Jakubovo námestie (Jacob’s Square) became Leninovo námestie (Lenin Square); new street names appeared, such as Molotov, Malinovsky, Suvorov, Red Army, Marx, Stalin, Russian, Kalinin, Chapayev Streets, etc. Today’s Hlavné námestie (Main Square) was called Masarykovo námestie (Masaryk Square) until 1953, when it was renamed Námestie 4. apríla (April 4 Square).<sup>15</sup> There was also a proposal to rename the representative Carlton – Savoy hotel to Moscow, Leningrad, Prague, ‘or otherwise’ (it probably sounded too capitalistic).

Shop windows, the viewing of which was a popular part of walking around the city, contributed to a significant change of the appearance of streets as well. Owners of private firms had paid attention to creativity and artistic design of their shop windows and advertising banners. After 1948, private entrepreneurship was banned, and advertising spaces turned into trivial monotony. Shop windows and public spaces in general became places of Communist propaganda. Political slogans and symbols of the regime (star, hammer and sickle, flags, posters, works of art, commemorative and symbolic objects, statues and portraits of Communist leaders, workers, shock workers, later heroes of socialist work, etc.) complete the picture of the 'socialist city'.

In 1957–1960, the Slavín monument was erected at the Soviet soldiers cemetery on a hill above the city. Along with pious respect for the fallen soldiers, it also had an ideological function. It was designed as a city landmark. The monumental memorial with the victorious statue of a Soviet soldier on a tall obelisk was to be visible from all parts of the city and was to commemorate the city's liberation by the Soviet Army. However, another distinctive symbol stood in the vicinity – the Church of Our Lady of the Snows. It was built during the wartime Slovak State with a 50-metre tower and a large Christian cross. The church tower was removed after Slavín was completed.

The imprinting of the new ideology also concerned public life. One of the first areas that began changing was anniversaries. The Communists attached the greatest importance to February 25, which was celebrated as Working People's Victory over bourgeois and reaction. The May Day, common already during the first republic, acquired a purely Communist framework for celebrating the founders and leaders of the proletariat, the Communist Party, and socialist society. On the eve of the Great October Socialist Revolution celebrations<sup>16</sup>, large lantern parades of pupils from Bra-

tislava schools were held, ending with fireworks over the Danube. The Month of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship was also introduced, with a wide range of events for employees and the public. Along with the introduction of new holidays, the ideological designers also focused on church holiday, seeking to weaken their influence on society. One of the first ones that they attempted to transform into an ideologically suitable form was Christmas.

In the early 1950s, Christmas disappeared from the local press, as if it did not exist. It was mentioned rarely, in a context acceptable for the given era, such as “*for a workers’ joyful Christmas*”. The urban Christmas market was renamed the Winter Market and, in 1953, Father Frost’s Winter Market. It was a period when the cult of Dedo Mráz (Father Frost) began to be promoted, aimed to replace the Christian tradition of Jesus’ Birth. Antonín Zápotocký is attributed the statement: “Small Jesus grew up, got old, grew a moustache, and became Father Frost” (1952).<sup>17</sup> Father Frost is described as a “*loved bearded friend of kids*”, who brings them joy and gives gifts to the best pioneers. However, the change of the main Christmas symbols was not the only intention. “In the Pioneers’ Palace, the art department clubs have been diligently preparing for an entertainment show to joyfully welcome Father Frost, who will be followed all the way around the USSR on a large map displayed in the courtyard of the Pioneer Palace. Hobby groups will talk about every city in the Soviet Union that Father Frost visits on his pilgrimage from distant Chukotka up to our borders.”<sup>18</sup> Initially, Father Frost came only to the Pioneer Palace on 28 December; however, since 1956, the event was usually held one week before Christmas, acquiring a citywide character. On a decorated carriage, accompanied by fairy-tale creatures (Snow White, bunny, clumsy bear Maco), fanfare players, and horse-riders, he headed from the Pioneer Palace to Hviezdoslavovo Square to meet pupils from Bratislava schools and convey them greetings from Soviet

pioneers. The Father Frost celebrations lasted for an entire week and had the form of events in the urban building, known as the Park of Culture and Leisure, but were also organised in firms (on the Advent Sunday): “What a Sunday it was! This is how many citizens sigh, many factory committees, many outstanding individuals whom the justice of fate assigned the difficult, yet honourable role of Father Frost. Because yes: on that Sunday, this generous old man visited many canteens, halls, and other employee gathering places to satisfy the tradition.”<sup>19</sup> In addition, ‘Father Frost dance parties’ took place in city hotels and pubs that were to have a ‘Christmas character’.

In Communist rhetoric, the Christmas holiday had a special status also because officials really tried to provide at least an illusion of sufficiency during the years of general scarcity: “The Father Frost Winter Market proves the big care by the party and the government to create as joyful and rich Christmas to all workers as possible.”<sup>20</sup> However, the life of the city’s inhabitants largely differed from propaganda reports.

The utopian ideas about building a socialist city and socialist life faced everyday reality. Even though censorship interfered with media content, some contemporary reports have been preserved, describing what everyday life in the city looked like. The article by a trade commissioner from 1956 titled ‘Surprises on the Christmas Market’ suggests what the state of supplies and services in the city was, especially during the preferred Christmas period. The article promises novelties in food supplies (sufficient domestic fruits, raw Christmas sausage, brain salami, gift baskets with Chinese tea and special ground coffee), new industrial goods items to be imported from the Soviet Union and from people’s democratic republics<sup>21</sup>, with an addition that the import would not be unlimited and that the demand for these goods would not be sufficiently met. The article assures that the shops will be clean, with good service, cordia-

lity, and courtesy. Material sufficiency has never been an essential need to celebrate holidays, but a desired future.

Christmas has two key principles: a religious, and an intimate. One is based on belief, the other one on spending the holiday with family. When perceived individually, both of them overlap. In the predominantly conservatively oriented Slovakia, changing this traditional value model of holidays was a naive wish of Communist ideologists.

### ***Attitudes to the historical appearance of the city***

The former neighbourhood Zuckerman dl in the area under the castle is a model example of the above-described processes from the modernisation stage up to the political solutions to the consequences of World War II. Let me quote from the publication dedicated to its memory (only a few houses remained there after the demolition): “The gradual decay of Zuckerman dl began after 1851. Wealthier citizens moved to the city, the houses and yards were turned into lower-category rental flats for poorer people, and by adjusting the Danube riverbank, part of the houses sank below the ground level. The war events after 1939 accelerated the decline of this district. Many Jews perished in concentration camps, the majority of Germans were displaced, and the properties of the remaining inhabitants were soon nationalised. The dilapidated neighbourhood spoiled the appearance of the city and gradually disappeared. Many objects were removed when building a road along the riverbank, and its western part fell victim to the construction of three tower blocks. During the construction of the New Bridge, demolition was performed by rows.” (Filo – Pöss – Šilbersky, 2006: 4).

### ***‘The City of Peace’***

This inscription welcomed Bratislava visitors along the access

roads and, even today, it is one of the information stories about the city's history. The slogan 'Bratislava – the City of Peace' is an example of a mythised past and of the political instrumentalisation of a historic event. In the spirit of the Communist ideology, it was interpreted as a city that contributed to peace, joins 'the fight for peace', and promotes 'peace all over the world'. In terms of its meaning, it followed up on the anti-capitalist propaganda during the Cold War era, which highlighted militant imperialism and, at the same time, the socialist countries' fight for peace. Nevertheless, the slogan 'The City of Peace' has a different history.

In 1805, the peace treaty between France and Austria was signed in Pressburg as the result of the 'Battle of the Three Emperors' at Austerlitz (Slavkov). The city did not contribute to the peace in any way, it was just the host of the ceremony. Nowadays, the myth of the 'city of peace' and of the Napoleonic history is used commercially as an interesting tourist attraction. Today, there is a statue of a Napoleonic soldier on the Main Square, with which almost every student takes a picture. The historic event of the signing of the treat forms part of guides' information on the archbishops' palace, where a commemorative plaque is placed. 'Bratislava – The City of Peace' is an important topic in city guides and is also a frequent advertising slogan of tourist agencies.

## **STORIES OF THE CITY AFTER TRANSITION TO A MARKET ECONOMY**

Bratislava is one of those Central European cities that overwent complete post-socialist transformation after the fall of the Communist regime. This process concerned all areas – from politics, economy, legislation, etc. up to the daily life of individuals. The situation became more complicated because of the split of Czechoslovakia. The Slovak Republic, unknown to the world, was born, with Bratislava becoming its capital. Along with society, the

city changed as well. The visual symbols of the Communist era disappeared from public spaces, such as the monumental concrete sculpture of the first Czechoslovak working class president, Klement Gottwald, which was blasted with explosives without any protest (1991). The streets and squares (there were a lot of them) which had been named in the spirit of the previous ideology changed their names. The transformation of society was accompanied by the dissolution or transformation of several institutions and enterprises which were taken over into private ownership by new managers, including global companies with distinctive visual symbolism.

It is well-known that the driving force behind globalisation is mainly cities. Anthropological literature notes that the relationship between cities and globalisation is dialectical: cities are indeed influenced and 'shaped' by globalisation yet are also control centres where globalisation emerges and develops.<sup>22</sup> The research on Slovak cities suggests that, even though all cities are gradually pulled into globalisation processes, there are significant differences between them when it comes to the possibilities to influence these processes. They represent a conflict of interest between local policies (and politicians) – domestic and foreign business groups – and inhabitants (civic activities), in which a conflict or an interplay of the 'global and local' is manifested in various forms.

Immediately after the breakthrough year 1989, the city was penetrated by several global entities which are defined by not being based in a specific town, but by being the same everywhere (such as Coca-Cola) or the same externally (such as McDonald's). On the other hand, globally distributed products, chain stores, or business activities are at the same time local, because they are perceived, interpreted, and limited locally. Ted Lewellen notes that global culture is never manifested in a pure form; it is always manifested only in interaction. Just as culture originates, develops, and lives

locally, global culture lives only through another culture.<sup>23</sup> Today, many places and their inhabitants in Slovakia are to a greater or lesser degree influenced by numerous global processes and phenomena; however, this does not mean that they are absorbed by global culture. On the contrary, it is places and their inhabitants who absorb and recreate global culture.<sup>24</sup> And this intersection of the global and local is often called glocalisation. And it is in this context that the story of Bratislava developed, too.

In this stage, entrepreneurs looked for a place on the market, and rented business or production premises often changed their owner, focus, as well as the visual symbols of the shop or company. Constant changes impaired orientation in the city. The streets and squares that had been named in the spirit of the Communist ideology changed. The transformation of society was accompanied by the dissolution or transformation of several institutions and enterprises which were taken over into private ownership. The first global enterprises (Tatra banka, Eurotel, Volkswagen Bratislava) and large store chains (Kmart-Prior, IKEA, Telekom Slovakia) settled in the city. The process of changes was accompanied by a conflict of interest between local political parties, domestic and foreign business entities, and inhabitants (civic activists), in which a conflict or an interplay of the global economic process and local citizens' interests was manifested in various forms.

Mass migration is a visible part of globalisation. Given the low numbers of migrants, immigration is not a major problem in Slovak cities. We are at the stage when foreigners living in our country are little visible and themselves, they consider it necessary to assimilate. This also suggests a low degree of the penetration of cultural influences through migration. Tourism development is another part of globalisation. It is influenced or directly managed by commercial forces or by regional or local policies. In Bratislava, foreign tourism has in particular become a driving force for the

development of the city centre (Old Town), the hotel industry, the gastronomy sector, etc.

### **STORY OF THE CITY CENTRE**

Bratislava joined global networks voluntarily, as proven by its proactive approach to attracting foreign investments. It is not a global but a globalised city thanks to its urban policies (supported by its official development strategy) and the business activities of domestic companies. Property restitution or return to the original owners and the sale of municipal buildings to private hands enabled their new owners to quickly restore neglected buildings in the Old Town. In this stage, the city management carried out the historical centre revitalisation project, with an idea to also 'revive Korzo' (pedestrian zone or promenade). The traditional form of strolling down the promenade, known also from other European cities, disappeared due to politically unacceptable reasons of mass gatherings of people after the occupation in 1968. The aim was to return social life back to the city centre. A complete replacement of the paving of the streets and squares was carried out; however, it was also planned to restore the housing stock and increase the number of permanent residents in the centre. Departure from this intention was due to economic conditions. The high costs for the reconstruction of historic buildings, the lack of suitable buildings for consulates after the establishment of the independent republic, the influx of 'rich Western tourists', and individual business plans limited the new functions of the centre. Most buildings became occupied by solvent firms, banks, consulates, and commercially successful shops. Their business activities focused primarily on tourism: hotels, luxurious restaurants and shops, pubs, fast food, jewellery, cafés, etc. A prominent environmental activist, Martin Huba, stated that "despite all attempts to revive the Old Town in the short term, it continues dying in direct proportion to the loss

of its permanent residents”. The idea of reviving promenading in the Old Town disappeared with the development of society.

Simultaneously with the trend of suppressing universal cultural patterns, the idea of locality began to be applied, manifested by following up on the historical character of the city centre and Slovak specificities. It was a concept of environmental activities who, yet before the end of the Communist era, criticised the contemporary approaches and demanded the protection of historical monuments. Their programme was accepted only at the beginning of the transformation of society and, in this spirit, it was partially possible to restore the original appearance of the architecture of several buildings, but the original function of only some of them (at that time, for instance, Cafe Mayer, Steiner antique bookstore, U františkánov and Pod baštou wineries, etc.). The trend towards historicism and localness was also visible in the artistic decoration of the interiors of public bars and pubs (in particular, contemporary maps, graphics, and photos from the times of the old town).

The legendisation of the well-known Bratislava figure – the weirdo Schöner Náci – and the placing of his statue near the Main Square also contributed to reviving local identity. The statue of the French soldier on this square refers to the history of the city as well. The French troops were present in the city in 1805, when the Bratislava Piece was signed between Napoleon and the Austrian emperor Franz I at the Primate’s Palace in 1805, as already mentioned earlier. However, the French victory and the signing of the treaty was unfortunate for the city because of the high costs; despite these complications, this event has become a marketing brand in promoting the city today.

The efforts aimed to increase the attractiveness of the city centre have been suppressed by an opposite trend – the decentralisation of the functions of the urban space. Some shopping and cultural functions of the centre have moved to the surrounding neighbo-

urhoods or to isolated complexes on the city outskirts. These include the shopping complexes of multinational companies Tesco, Carrefour, Ikea etc., as well as domestic investment companies and developers (Avion Shopping Park, Aupark, Polus City Centre, etc.), which became multi-functional, much-sought-after sites. The central area of the city thus lost its original position in the field of business, but its representative, administrative, and service functions strengthened.

The penetration of globalisation can be also observed in the gentrification of the centre, where the process of renewal houses and flats was accompanied by the reduction and change of inhabitants from more solvent classes.<sup>25</sup> However, smaller branches gradually opened also in the centre and the wider surroundings, thus enriching citizens' shopping possibilities. With the new investment projects of Eurovea and a new bus station, the city acquired not only more commercial spaces, but also spaces for social activities and, in the case of Eurovea, an attractive leisure area along the Danube riverbank.

Some cultural events organised in the Old Town's public spaces are also built on local traditions. Their accompanying purpose is to increase tourist attractiveness and the citizens' pride, but to also enhance the immigrants' relationship to the city. For instance, the Christmas market with the final spectacular New Year's Eve party is a multi-genre event, with the permitted sale of only domestic specialties on the Main Square and the performance of folklore groups from all corners of Slovakia, thus responding to the traditional local patriotism of immigrant citizens. The 'Coronation Feast' builds on the famous history of the city as the place of coronation of Hungarian rulers in 1563–1830. The coronation ceremonies are re-enacted at several places of the Old Town, and the route of the traditional royal procession is marked by marks in the street pavement. Every year, an event consisting of the imitation of the

coronation ceremony of one of the nineteen kings and queens of Hungary is organised. Here, history fully serves the image of the city.

### **STORY OF RESTORING THE HISTORICAL APPEARANCE OF THE CITY**

In the middle of the last century, a city neighbourhood, called Podhradie, was situated under Bratislava's dominant landmark, an impressive castle towering over the city. It surrounded the castle hill and consisted of several parts. Their names are derived from the historical settlements near the Danube: Zuckermandel and Weidritz, the former Jewish ghetto Schlossgrunt, the Schloss Strasse road leading to the castle, and the adjacent streets. In 1850, they were annexed to the city and integrated in the Theresienstadt neighbourhood, which received its Slovak name Podhradie in 1920. In 1948, the Danube riverbank began to be rebuilt into a four-lane road, which required the demolition of several buildings. At the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, most buildings in Podhradie were demolished because of the construction of the new bridge over the Danube.<sup>26</sup> Over 300 building objects were removed (Bútorá, 2011). Only a few of the most historically valuable buildings in the western part of Zuckermandel and the remains of the Water Tower have been preserved, and the rest of the area remained undeveloped.

After the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, the sins of this era began to be pointed out. The demolition in Podhradie attracted a great deal of media criticism. Older inhabitants preserved memories of the local colour of the narrow streets and remote corners of the old neighbourhood, the characteristic features of the former Fish Market Square with St. Martin's Cathedral, the Neolog synagogue, and the Holy Trinity sculpture. These memories were nurtured not only by the local press. The pictures of the

old Podhradie on postcards, photos, drawings, or paintings began to be used in the interiors of pubs or in advertising or tourist brochures. They have also penetrated the internet and make the extinguished neighbourhood present again. Interest in the historical forms of the city grew simultaneously with the restoration of monuments in the Old Town. There was a consensus in the public discourse that the demolition of Pohradie was a big loss for the city. Publicity restored the historical value of former Podhradie, and the undeveloped spaces became places of memory.

Urban-planning and architectural plans for a new construction in Podhradie came to the attention of the public. Business groups and the involved architects considered the old buildings to be outdated and looked for modern solutions. On the other hand, civic activists with the support of the public began pointing out the lost historical value of the space and demanded a suitable reconstruction of Podhradie.

### ‘OBNOVME PODHRADIE’ CIVIC INITIATIVE

Obnovme Podhradie (Let’s Restore Podhradie) was an example of history-oriented civic activism in Bratislava. The renewal of the historical building area began to be officially considered immediately after the change of the regime in 1989. The author of the urban-planning study Bratislava – Podhradie, A. Németh, wrote: “After the Velvet Revolution, the revitalisation of Podhradie became a programme of the local government. The public, which did care about how Bratislava looks like... also welcomed the emerging Podhradie revitalisation programme.”<sup>27</sup>

The interest of environmentally, culturally, and historically oriented civic activists was stimulated by an architectural competition for the development of this area, the results of which were presented by the city government in 2002. The winning proposal contained modernist buildings without any ties to the

historical structure of the space. As a reaction, the Obnovme Podhradie civic initiative was established with the aim to convince, with public support, the local authorities to return citizens the ‘Lost City’ by restoring Baroque palaces, historical landmarks, original streets, and the overall appearance of Podhradie. They launched a civic campaign, in the framework of which they organised public discussions with the representatives of the municipal authorities and citizens, in cooperation with a community foundation they established a financial fund and, through their own website, billboards, newspaper articles, posters, interviews, and exhibitions, they conducted a massive media campaign and organised a petition and a citizen discussion forum. In their call, they drew the public’s attention to the essence of the problem: “They want to build a mega-complex in the historically valuable Podhradie area, similar to the monolithic buildings from the socialist period”; “how is it possible that our experts are insensitive of the ‘genius loci’?”; “the atmosphere of old Bratislava, which we can experience only through old photos, is being systematically disrupted”.<sup>28</sup> The issue of new construction became a public cause which made the competent authorities to cancel the result of the public tender.

In the meantime, the city government unexpectedly sold a part of the land in Podhradie to a private investor. The Obnovme Podhradie civic initiative requested the sale contract to be made public, but the city hall declined to do so. Suspicion grew that the city hall and the mayor acted in a non-transparent manner in favour of the investor. Along with the campaign, the activists focused on controlling the local authorities’ activities. They submitted their comments on the new urban development plan with a petition supported by 2,500 citizens.<sup>29</sup> The construction in Podhradie was also dealt with by the Municipal Committee of the Slovak Union of Nature and Landscape Protection, the Society for a Sustainable

Development, as well as other civic associations, without being invited by the city hall to cooperate.

In 2007, the results of the second public tender for the Vydricka zone were published, in which foreign architects' teams (Italy, Poland) were more successful than the domestic ones. None of the winning projects was based on a historical model and all of them envisaged the construction of modern buildings. The results of citizens' electronic voting contradicted the architects' visions. According to a member of the Obnovme Podhradie civic initiative, Martin Huba, around 93 per cent of the survey respondents (2003) wished construction in historicising style: "This is a proof of how they go blindly against the majority will of the citizens. I consider it terrorism on the part of the developers".<sup>30</sup>

The extensive debate showed how collective memory influenced the attitudes of the debaters involved. The negative professional and lay opinions presented in the media created the impression that most citizens were against the investor's and local government's plans: "The castle and Bratislava's Podhradie is a place, the core of the city, where Bratislava has always been. This is where the city's genius loci comes from. We have more than enough of sterile glass – so-called modern – facades on which window-cleaners dangle awkwardly on the rope. This needs to be preserved and possibly restored."<sup>31</sup>

Most debaters argued in favour of historical buildings, mentioning examples from European cities which managed to sensitively reconstruct war destroyed buildings, squares, or entire neighbourhoods. However, the then Chief Architect of Bratislava, Štefan Šlachta, declared publicly that the future Vydricka in Podhradie could not be historical, because it was a past that could not be returned to.<sup>32</sup> The prevailing opinion among the citizens' reactions was that the investor and the city hall acted against the interest of most citizens and that architects did not consider local history

important because they were not natives of Bratislava, for which they mainly blamed the Chief Architect. In the contributions to the discussion, the identity of a Bratislava resident became part of the argumentation.

In 2010, the investor company presented another project in which, according to its media statements, the historical space was respected by partly preserving the street structure and by the building material used (stone). The response of the civic initiative is represented by the call: “One cannot accept this!” The public was introduced to another building project in 2012. The city hall with a new leadership organised a public discussion on the project, in which activists again argued in favour of a replica of former Vydrica. Unsuccessfully, however, the majority of those present at least agreed that the new construction should at least resemble the old neighbourhood. The project was published in the media and triggered an extensive civic debate, the content of which is illustrated by the following statements: “I am glad that Bratislava citizens are mostly against modern construction. And we have to do everything we can to prevent having cubes there. In short, let them remember forever that cubes belong neither to the centre nor to a protected zone. Let alone to the area under the castle. There are other neighbourhoods where they can build them.”<sup>33</sup>

The people’s reactions that I collected from 2002 until the present suggest that the pictures of old Vydrica are deeply rooted in the historical awareness of Bratislava citizens. The efforts to restore the original buildings mostly met with sympathies of the citizens who joined the public discourse. They were positive also about the activities of the civic activists themselves: “I am happy about the activity of the Obnovme Podhradie civic initiative – because of two things. Firstly, this activity may help improve the aesthetic and functional appearance of Bratislava. Secondly, because it is

another informal platform that points to the non-transparency of decision-making on public matters, and not only in our city.”<sup>34</sup>

The activists from the Obnovme Podhradie initiative managed to point to the conflict between the commercial interests of developers, related architects, and city officials on the one hand and the citizens’ cultural interest in continuing the historical values of the city on the other hand. They encouraged a part of the public to join several protests, promote their common interest in preserving the historical identity of Podhradie, and demand citizens’ opinions to be respected. The public opinion prompted the developer company to adjust the project, which was not carried out, but was partly modified at the end.

### STORY OF THE VISUAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE CITY

One of the problematic business groups in the globalisation process were developers and their companies with a strong capital and political background. They built the first high-rise buildings which changed the city’s appearance and panorama. In most cases, citizens perceived them negatively and could not imagine their city ‘with skyscrapers’ and with an architecture resembling unified buildings all over the world: “Can you imagine Bratislava with skyscrapers? How, for God’s sake, is it going together?” was one of the many reflections on high-rise buildings. The building activities also had another dimension. The citizens perceived the radical changes in urban spaces and lost the feeling of being at home: “As a Bratislava resident, I’m getting increasingly disgusted with Bratislava, and I think I’m going to move out and leave it all to the immigrants. Do you remember us talking after 1989 about all the things the Bolsheviks demolished? Now, they are demolishing like during the Communist period... and are building glass monsters.” Objections were raised not only against the approval of some plans which, according to citizens, inappropriately changed

the appearance of the site and of the city in general. Criticism was also directed to the involvement of the municipality or local governments in their approval. “Developers can afford everything, because they can buy anybody,” citizens thought.

Around 2005, the real estate business reached its peak and sufficient funds triggered a strange ‘competition’ among developers to build the tallest building in the city. The result at that time was five buildings higher than 100 metres and twelve buildings higher than 80 metres. However, the construction plans included another twelve buildings of over 100 metres, of which seven were to be built within the Old Town – not in the historical centre, but in its vicinity. Four of them were supposed to be even more than 150 metres high, which is a minimum skyscraper height.

There were designs for dozens of high-rise buildings. However, civic activists pointed to the architectural uniformity of the new glass-aluminium buildings, which do not create a distinctive character of the place, the identifying features of buildings are easily confused with other towns, do not bear any local features, and disrupt local urbanism. The local characteristics of urban spaces thus disappear. In this regard, the names of the new dominant landmarks, which were not based on common names of the locations and copied foreign patterns, were also criticised (Lakeside, River Park, Vienna Gate, Omnipolis, Emporia Towers, Twin City, Megamax, etc.). There were also positive exceptions, where the names derived from the old designation of the space (Aupark, Apollo, Centrá, Klingerka, Slovany), or at least from the local names (Westend Square, Petržalka City, Lamačský port).

## **STORY OF THE DANUBE RIVERBANK**

The Danube riverbank on the Old Town side is an example of how collective memory is linked to specific places. Developers’ activities focused also on this area with three separate spaces and

projects. Citizens presented different opinions, either accepting or rejecting them. Why was there a difference in opinions?

The first civic activity was triggered by the building plans in the area under the Bratislava castle hill. It is a space the most part of which was demolished at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. However, the history of this site is closely tied to the life of the city. The picturesque character of the Fish Market Square and the streets of Vydrica and Zuckerman del, as well as the fates of the Jewish quarter and of the demolished synagogue, are well remembered by the citizens. These memories are intensive, nurtured not only by the local press, but also by conservation activities. The local memory tied to this place contradicts the construction projects in this area. These are not riverbank projects and do not have a revitalisation nature aimed at enriching the city in line with the above-mentioned concepts. They were rejected by the public, as proven by the debate stimulated by the Obnovme Podhradie civic initiative: “It is sad, or even surprising, that this precious part of Bratislava with the oldest history is to be developed with architecture that does not correspond at all with the genius loci, its surroundings, and which would at least slightly heal the barbaric scar on this city, at least the way they do in other European cities. It is therefore necessary for us to be vigilant – and by that, I mean not only the officials and city representatives, but all of us, citizens of Bratislava, who are not indifferent about how their city looks like.”<sup>35</sup>

The situation was different for a development company in connection with the construction of the Eurovea complex in an unused area of the Danube riverbank. There were free port areas with smaller houses and one larger building of a former warehouse. This ‘non-urban space’ did not have a special ‘genius loci’ that had to be respected; however, the functionalist building of the neglected warehouse did have an architectural value. With the reconstruction of this building, the investors gained public support. The

Eurovea project is a combination of the American and European concept of urban revitalisation. A modern complex was erected on the abandoned Danube riverbank, using an original building, while also considering the cultural and social needs of the city. These include, for instance, the placement of the Milan Rastislav Štefánik Monument, closely linked to the history of the city. The public received the new complex positively despite its 'glass architecture', commonly considered the symbol of globalisation.

The third revitalisation project for the Danube riverbank is known as River Park. The project is dominated by Kempinski Hotel with a riverfront promenade with shops and pubs. The building land is a narrow strip along the Danube and is used consistently. The height of the buildings reaches up to twelve floors, but despite the fact that the massive appearance of the building was criticised by the citizens, it did not stimulate a serious discussion. It was only in 2010 that the effort to launch the construction of the second part provoked strong statements and comparisons: "River Park was supposed to be beautiful, showy, and promenade-like. And this is nothing, just disgusting, tall, glass buildings with small windows, no display architecture." According to the citizens, the promise that the project would revive the riverbank and be beneficial for the city remained unfulfilled.

For citizens, the transformations of spaces and developers were a topic that stimulated numerous public discussions with controversial attitudes. High-rise buildings, shopping complexes with global brand shops, followed by developers and their creators and builders – all these were visible signs of the penetration of globalisation into the city. In this context, Bratislava was a good example of contradictory citizens' reactions. The new buildings that disrupted the dominant features of the space were evaluated according to the degree of their personal involvement. They perceived space to be locally bounded (depending on whether it is or is not the

place of their life), without caring of remote locations. However, there were also civic activities that responded to the building activities in the city as a whole. Local history was that point, that unknown ‘genius loci’, which means an insurmountable barrier for one group and a meaningless old thing that needs to be replaced by a new spirit of times for the other.

## LANDMARKS OF GLOBALISATION

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the construction of unusual glass buildings, multi-storey large office buildings, large shopping and entertainment centres, and high-rise buildings reminding of skyscrapers was launched. They have significantly changed the picture of Bratislava. By appearance, they do not differ from their model buildings elsewhere in the world. Civic activists publicly warned that the local characteristics of urban areas were disappearing, pointed to the architectural uniformity of new glass-aluminium buildings which do not create a distinctive character of the place, the identifying features of buildings are easily confused with other towns, do not bear any local features, and disrupt local urbanism.

The first large shopping centres were built by Bratislava entrepreneurs with foreign investment backgrounds: J&T Group built the ‘Polus City Centre’<sup>36</sup>, and HB Reavis Group the ‘Aupark Shopping Centre’<sup>37</sup>. Shortly afterwards, the global company Inter IKEA Centre Group came with an even larger project – the ‘Avion Shopping Park’. It was a period of Bratislava’s fast economic growth accompanied by the influx of foreign investments. In 2010, the British company Ballymore Properties launched the operation of the ‘Eurovea’ complex. Its then president Sean Mulryan justified the decision to build in Slovakia with the country’s good macro-economic results and political support of investments into development: “What also counted was the similarity of the go-

vernments and economies of both countries.”<sup>38</sup> The development company drew on a quality multi-functional project, the result of which is not only a shopping, hotel, residential, and office part, but also spaces for leisure and an extensive public infrastructure along the Danube riverbank. The quality was to be ensured by an international team: the main construction project was prepared by Slovak architects, the retail facilities by an American architect, the hotel design by a British company, and landscape architecture by French. Eurovea met with success, which is proven by the fact that I have not encountered any negative reactions by otherwise active urban activists or the public. The developer added that it was a particularly uncomplicated project on a vacant land and at an excellent place, without obstructing buildings, and without owners and lessees to deal with.

The entry of multinational companies was fully manifested in the construction of high-rise buildings. Although Bratislava had had several buildings of this type already before the revolution<sup>39</sup>, their placement did not distort the building height of the older parts of the city. The first buildings resembling skyscrapers were constructed by banks – the headquarters of Všeobecná úverová banka from 1997 (88m) and the new building of the National Bank of Slovakia from 2002 (111.6m). Gradually, the projects of other buildings began to be carried out, exceeding several times the existing buildings – Millennium Tower I (80m, 2001), Millennium Tower II (100m, 2003), residential building Glória (100m, 2005), Tower 115 (104m, 2006), City Business Centre (107m, 2007). There were several plans for buildings whose height was close to skyscrapers.<sup>40</sup> The completed ones met with mixed responses, but the published proposals for even higher buildings scattered around the city provoked several negative reactions from experts and citizens.

After overcoming the crisis years, works on several large-scale

projects were launched, which significantly changed Bratislava's panorama. The Panorama City multi-functional complex (two 108m high buildings) is situated at Landarerova Street in the vicinity of the relatively low new building of the Slovak National Theatre. Close to is the 100m high building Tower 115. Two projects are being carried out at Chalupkova zone<sup>41</sup>, where, according to the building regulation for this area, up to twenty high-rise buildings can be constructed with the height from 90 to 130 metres. The first one is a multi-functional complex at Čulenova Street with five high-rise buildings, the two tallest ones having 115m. The second project, Twin City, on the corner of Karadžičova and Mlynské Nívy Streets counts with a 93m high building. In the vicinity, there are two towers of approximately the same height, VÚB and CBC. Closer to the Danube River, the Eurovea II complex is being built with an over 150 metres high building, i.e., the first skyscraper in the city. Although investors and architects sensitively react to market developments and change the planned heights of buildings, it is certain that a new city district will grow in this part of the city in the near future, with a concentration of high-rise buildings.

## **DISAPPEARANCE OF INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS**

Development companies are business entities in the field of construction and real estates, are linked to strong financial groups, and are active in the global market space. The core part of their business activities is the complete implementation of construction projects from the purchase of land to the rental of buildings. The identification and purchase of land, the building permit, construction works, and the approval process are those areas of business in which they face the political establishment that controls local self-governing institutions (city hall and city council; municipal office and municipal council). Since the beginning of developers'

activities in the city, citizens viewed these ties with reluctance because of suspicions of dishonest practices and corruption in non-transparent decision-making processes. This mainly concerned the lands connected to the history of the city.

Let us mention one example of numerous demolitions of industrial buildings in Bratislava. Development companies found suitable and relatively large lands for new construction within the industrial zone of the Danube port area up to Mlynské nivy. These lands were formerly occupied by Kablo and Gumon factories, the production halls of the Bratislava Car Factory (Bratislavské automobilové závody), a power plant, an urban heating plant, smaller production plants and workshops, as well as the abandoned building of the former Apollo refinery. After Slovakia entered the market space, these obsolete enterprises lost competitiveness and production was stopped. After being sold, the development companies presented their plans to the public, which envisaged the complete demolition of an entire industrial city zone. Civic activists attempted to save at least some buildings that would remind of the history of the industrial modernisation of the city in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the boiler house in Kablovka by the well-known Feigler architects' family from Bratislava, and the press shop in Gumonka. They did not manage to save them by having them declared a cultural monument, as they had been demolished before a decision was issued (2008). A new Klingerka complex (after a preserved Klinger Colony) will be erected in the Gumon zone, and an almost completed Twin City complex already stands on the lands of former Kablovka. Despite civic activists' protests, only three buildings have been preserved within the entire area – the restored port warehouse no. 7 in *Eurovea*, the heat plant by architect Dušan Jurkovič, and a former assembly hall, in which the *Design Factor* now successfully operates.<sup>42</sup>

## **PUBLIC SPACES AND CITIZENS' ACTIVITIES**

The public spaces of the city are those which are located on public land, are undeveloped, open, and publicly available to all. Citizens consider public spaces to be 'theirs' and are sensitive to any interference in their form and functions. They perceive these places through their meaning for the quality of life in the city. The participatory process is a common procedure in designing such public spaces. For instance, in 2016, the Old Town city district commissioned a report on public involvement in the planning of the improvement of public spaces in Južné predmestie (Southern Suburb) near the Danube, according to which a qualitative survey was conducted and a public meeting with citizens as well as two expert workshops were organised. However, this kind of practice was born with difficulty.

### ***Protection of urban green spaces***

The City of Bratislava owned a small forest in Petržalka, in close proximity to Sad Janka Kráľa (Janko Kráľ Park). It was unfenced, freely accessible, and perceived as part of the Park. The Municipality first leased it quietly to an investor which decided in 2005 to construct buildings on this plot and requested to buy the land. Paradoxically, the urban development plan allowed for the development of this area, thus envisaging the felling of the forest. Conservationists proposed preserving the forest as a protected part of the urban green spaces with a supporting petition signed by 14,000 citizens. The District Environmental Office rejected their request. In autumn 2006, the nature conservation association Nádej pre Sad Janka Kráľa (Hope for Janko Kráľ Park) organised a protest rally. Over a thousand citizens joined to form a living chain and surrounded the forest as a symbol of civic protection of this public space. They gained the support of a local deputy, who

achieved a suspension of the sale and sought to cancel the land lease. However, the citizens' efforts ultimately ended in failure.

Another petition was provoked in 2008 by the city's plans concerning the forest park in Petržalka between the two Draždiak lakes. It states the following: "We, the undersigned citizens, hereby request the City Hall of the Capital City of Bratislava, as well as the Petržalka City District, to never again sell any of its lands with greenery and never commission any study, plan, or project proposal related in any manner to urban green areas without a proper public opinion survey or without the demands of the residents of the given area and their cooperation or at least without their consent by means of a representative mini-referendum."<sup>43</sup> The city did not give up its plans and, in 2010, the investor company Formát applied for a permit to fell over two thousand trees for the so-called forest park revitalisation. The mayor's spokesperson justified it by arguing that one-third of them prevent the construction of a noise barrier, a cycling route, parking lots, and a pathway, and the rest will enable creating a 'modern forest park'. The citizens disapproved the project and since the newly elected Petržalka local council recognised their arguments based on an expert analysis (raising also other objections), the project was halted.

One of the much-sought-after sites of Bratislava residents is Železná studienka, located on the edge of the urban forests in the Small Carpathians. Ferrous mineral water flowed through this area, and so the Ferdinand Spa was open here in 1830 and was later rebuilt into a smaller hotel with a restaurant. It was a place for walks, boating, fishing, as well as various social events in nature. Due to increased traffic, the municipality decided to open the first trolleybus line in former Pressburg (1908). Even though the original buildings of the hotel and of the pavilion gradually decayed and were demolished during the socialist period (1970), Železná studienka has retained its popularity as the best natural environ-

ment for relaxation and sports near the city. The attractiveness of the location caught the attention of a development company, which came with the plan to restore the swimming pool and the sanatory with a housing function, and to build twelve new recreational facilities. The company presented the modified plan to the local authorities in 2013. The spokesperson of the New Town (Nové Mesto) city district, to which this location belongs, said: “We have rejected several proposals that envisaged the creation of various apartment houses and other functions, which we disapprove. They would disproportionately interfere with the area.” The local government requested the restoration of this zone into its appearance from the earlier half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which the newest investor’s proposal did not meet.<sup>44</sup> The mayor of the city and the mayor of the city district gave their prior consent to the plan.

The lovers of Carpathian forests established the ‘Zachráňme Železnú studienku’ (‘Save Železná studienka’) civic initiative and launched an initiative against construction at this site. They did not trust the statements of the investor and the local government according to which they would only renovate the buildings and cultivate the environment. At the public presentation, they learnt from the developer that it intended to compensate the losses from operating a swimming pool with the operation of a sanatory and medical centre. As an argument in favour, they used the urban development plan which does not allow construction there, the lack of infrastructure, the existing traffic restrictions, etc. In the petition committee’s opinion, they stated the following: “Our aim is to preserve the recreation area for all people, without car access and without construction. We demand preserving the Youth Path for families with children, runners, bikers, and tourists, and not for construction machinery, cars, and vacuum trucks.” Thanks also to their initiative, the project was stopped.

The case of the park at Belopotockého Street is a good example

of a complicated development of the relationship between local authorities, developers, and citizens and relates to what has been left from former Esterházy gardens in the vicinity of the Slovak Radio buildings. The activities of the residents from the neighbouring vicinity began in 1996 and ended in 2014, having fought for 'their park' for eighteen years. They founded the civic initiative for preserving the environment in the Old Town after finding out that, according to their statements, the park was no longer 'state-owned', but in private hands. It was obvious from the beginning that the owner planned to build on the land, which they wanted to prevent and preserve the park as a public space with an urban green space. And so they examined the legality of the transfer of ownership, changes in the city's urban development plan, the legality of the building permit procedure and of the felling of trees and greenery, preparatory building works, etc. They identified several misconducts by the municipal institutions involved in the procedure, including the fact that the civil public was excluded from the building decision-making procedure on purpose. Through judicial channels, they managed to stop four large owners' projects and, in 2011, they achieved that the Supreme Court confirmed the decision of the Regional Court (2010) on the cancellation of the land-use decision concerning the location of construction in the park. They wrote the following about their success: "After fifteen years of fighting to save the park, our civic association finally achieved the court confirming that the arguments of citizens can also have a legal basis and should be considered by the national and local authorities when making decisions. It would be in the interest of both these authorities and citizens, i.e., in the public interest, as has already been confirmed in several other cases."<sup>45</sup>

But while they argued with the building authorities and the local government, the park was almost completely destroyed. A construction pit was excavated in it, and only 30 of the 120 trees and

not one of the bushes remained there. After the successful court proceeding, the activists from the civic association focused on the idea of revitalising the park. They wrote on their website: “The current legal state achieved by the citizens through their activity provides room to the city to finally take steps to save the park. After all, the citizens have been striving for sixteen years to save the greenery, the former urban mark that belongs to everyone, and not their own garden. They have so far used and exhausted all available options, including petitions, protests, lobbying, legal actions. New trees can always be planted, because there is no green site in our neighbourhood for the free movement of people and especially children.”<sup>46</sup> They made a deal with the investor and they jointly requested the mayor of the city to settle the dispute by means of exchange and allocation of another suitable land to the investor, which was finally agreed after three years. Before the city councillors’ vote, the civic activists summarised their efforts as follows: “During these eighteen years, our civic association organised four petitions (approx. seven thousand signatures), around 200 filings, appeals, and more than ten complaints to the courts to save the urban park, and all of them have also been confirmed by the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court. We have witnessed massive felling procedures with a large participation of citizens who were honestly involved in all actions. They are therefore anxiously waiting for the decision of the councillors who may thus remedy the error caused by the former local government representatives.”<sup>47</sup> The park eventually came under the administration of the Old Town, was restored, and opened to the public (2016).

I have presented a detailed description of the case of Belopotckého Street because it illustrates the audacity of the new entrepreneurs in acquiring property and of development companies in acquiring building lands in the city during the period of the post-socialist transformation of society. Initially, the urban park

became private property under unclear circumstances (1991) and was subsequently sold several times. The fact that the land registered as a park and green area was changed to a building land already during the process of approval of the new urban development plan of the city (2006), as well as the non-transparent decision-making and the unwillingness to review decisions imply the owners' ties to building offices and the local government. However, the long-lasting dispute also shows how the attitudes of local governments to citizens' activities aimed at transparency and citizens' involvement in decision-making gradually changed over years. Having evaluated the correlation in time between the above-described three urban locations, it is apparent that it happened after the local elections in 2010, when political nominees and local councillors with party ties were replaced by several independent candidates, experts in urban issues, and civic activists.

### ***Protection of public spaces***

In a survey of the citizens' opinions on the state of squares in the Old Town city district in 2012, up to one-third of respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with Kamenné námestie<sup>48</sup>, Šafárikovo námestie near the Comenius University (19%), and Námestie SNP (18%) squares. According to this survey, 78% of the respondents would not be against the involvement of the public sector in revitalisation. The survey was commissioned by the British company Lordship, which owned the already closed hotel Kyjev in the immediate vicinity of the Tesco department store (owner of a part of the square).<sup>49</sup> In the same year, the city hall began considering the sale of Kamenné námestie to transfer all vacant spaces around the Tesco-Kyjev complex to private ownership. The same developer Lordship that had commissioned the survey with positive results expressed interest in buying the square and, together with Tesco, they planned to "fill the square with appropriate functions" (the

project was not known at that time). The city council was expected to approve the sale with special consideration, i.e., without announcing a public tender. However, it was known that the developer had presented already in 2006 its intention to demolish the Kyjev hotel and the department store and to build a new shopping centre, two hotels, and a multi-functional building with flats and offices.

The city hall's attitude aroused mistrust in civic activists who pointed to the unclear plans of the private company, the presumed arbitrariness of the land owner in designing the buildings without respecting the opinions of the city government and the public, as well as the possibility of overbuilding the land and losing public spaces. The 'Bratislava otvorene' ('Bratislava Openly') association argued that the city council did not ask the citizens whether the square should be sold or not, and demanded a public debate. The new 'Námestie pre ľudí' ('Square for People') civic initiative was critical about the local government's plans: "Would it sell all neglected public spaces just because it is unable to create a strategy for their construction and maintenance?"<sup>50</sup> At Kamenné námestie, they prepared an event Square for People with various activities and with a survey of citizens' opinions and ideas about the square's future; in the Dunaj Centre of Culture, they organised a public debate with the chief architect of the city, I. Konrad, and invited experts in public spaces about the potential perspective of the square, listening also to the 'voices from the street', and presented their opinions, supported by experts' and citizens' statements, at the city council meeting. They managed to stop the sale process.

In the following period, the Námestie pre ľudí civic initiative organised several cultural events in this space, installed missing benches on the square and, by means of such activities, it indirectly demonstrated that it is public space that belongs to the citizen and that the city should take care of it. The 'Aliancia Stará tržnica' ('Old

Marketplace Alliance’) became also involved in the cultivation of the space and, in collaboration with the Slovak Governance Institute, Architects 2021, and the Landscape Architecture Laboratory, it obtained a grant for creating a participatory project about the appearance of Námestie SNP and Kamenné námestie squares. They reached out to the residents and ‘visitors’ of the squares, architects, and owners of lands, pubs, and restaurants, carried out an analysis of the survey, and proposed possible changes. Although this document does not contain a detailed reconstruction project, it is an extensive body of knowledge about the interlinked space of the two squares. They delivered it to the city hall as a source of inspiration for potential designers. However, the city has not yet launched a public tender.

### ***Revitalisation of public spaces***

The following example extends to the present and shows a change in attitudes of the municipal authorities to the restoration of public spaces. In 2012, the Old Town city district announced its intention to revitalise Šafárikovo námestie in line with the principle “cars underground, life and greenery above the ground”, envisaging the construction of underground garages<sup>51</sup> in collaboration with a private investor which would operate the building. Citizens were to be satisfied with the fact that there would be a park, a relaxation zone, a children’s playground, or an unspecified ‘new cultural space’ above the garages. From citizens’ responses to the published announcement: “Some Bratislava residents aren’t brainwashed and consider certain topics to be more important than parking. What a paradox that, according to the municipality, buses should disappear from the square, but cars and exhaust chimneys in the park above them are fine.”<sup>52</sup> The local government conducted a survey among the citizens, in which the majority of respondents opposed the project. The Old Town

mayor said that the survey results had been manipulated by civic activists who had talked about saving Šafárikovo námestie in the distributed leaflets. There was also a discussion with the residents of the affected area, who also rejected the plan. The people's great interest in the public space in their vicinity was proven by the published report, according to which the meeting room was filled "to the last seat" and was attended by "younger and older people, mothers with children, as well as the elderly".<sup>53</sup> In the end, the project was not carried out.

From the beginning, the new Old Town mayor approached the Šafárikovo námestie project in a transparent and participatory manner. In 2015, he organised a public discussion of the lay and expert public with the local government representatives, which he considered a prerequisite for launching a public tender. A commissioned professional agency conducted a survey among the residents and interviews with experts, organised a so-called planning meeting with the residents directly on the square, and carried out an extensive analysis. The winning project is currently at the stage of preparing its implementation. The opinion of the city's chief architect, Ingrid Konrad, about the project is interesting: "In this very precious inner city, individual cafés do not usurp space; seating is created, where everyone can sit down, even without ordering anything. This is a certain phenomenon of democracy, freedom, and awareness of the public space being common to all." This is an excerpt from the final report on public involvement in the Šafárikovo námestie planning, in which the authors appreciated the citizens' proactive approach: "For whatever reason they did it, the message is clear: people do care about public spaces and wish to be involved in the decision-making on how these spaces would look like, how they will be created, and what will happen in them" (Paulíniová – Čupková 2015:5).

A similar project is envisaged in the Ružinov city district. There

is a relatively large undeveloped space in front of the Pan-European University, used mainly by dog-walkers and provisionally intended for development activities. The initiative came from the 'Zelená Bratislava' ('Green Bratislava') civic association in collaboration with 'Kreatívna brána' ('Creative Gate'). They asked mainly the local residents whether buildings or a green park should be built on the vacant land. They probably knew the answer in advance, and the local council also expressed a favourable opinion. The modern 'Edible Park Ružinov' was created for the planting of over 90 tree species, a part of them being fruit trees (chestnut, pear, apple, walnut, quince, almond and other trees) available to visitors. The project presentation reads: "An edible forest will be planted in a part of the area, with full integration of the existing trees. A system of softening water elements will be organically integrated into the space, connected by a wide range of plant systems, made up of edible and medicinal herbs and meadow flowers, whose task will be to increase local biodiversity and the aesthetic charm of the city."

### **THE STORY OF THE CITY CONTINUES AND DOES NOT END**

The case of construction of a new neighbourhood under the castle revealed a conflict between the interests of business and related political groups and the civil community which became enthusiastic about the idea of restoring and protecting the historical values of the city. Several other similar cases (e.g., the demolition of former industrial buildings because of planned construction) provoked the reaction of civic activists. Confronted with the new owners of the buildings and lands, they pointed to the unlimited power of development groups, the failure or omissions of the competent authorities, the lack of transparency in the actions of local authorities, the subordination of political parties

to financial groups, and the lack of interest by the city government in respecting citizens' opinions. These opinions became part of the criticism of the uncoordinated building development of the city, the rapid growth of which were made possible given the social changes after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989. The interventions to preserve the historical identity of the urban spaces activated part of the public and became a motive for growing civic engagement in the post-socialist period.

The current mayor, Matúš Vallo, has a vision of how to develop the city's potential in the forthcoming period. His projects include tram line modernisation, transparent tenders, or support of the public utility company that takes care of summer and winter maintenance of roads and public green areas. He also plans to operatively deal with citizens' initiatives and eliminate minor accidents. Another of his plans is the restoration of the historical city spa Grossling, modernisation of public lightning, renewal of urban public green areas, as well as other prospective tasks in the development and improvement of the quality of life in the city.

It is the year 2022 and the story of the city does not end. We shall see what has managed to be done and what visions of this city will be turned into reality.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Magyarons meant Magyarised Slovaks.

<sup>2</sup> Politika, II., 1932, p. 229.

<sup>3</sup> For more details, see Arpáš, 2011: p. 106 etc.

<sup>4</sup> This difference in the numbers is due to the fact that the total number of 93,700 Czechs in 1938 was derived by the authorities from the place of birth; on the other hand, the number 77,500 was registered according to claiming the Czech nationality (Bystrický 2000: 30). The largest number of Czechs was recorded during the 1930 census: 25,177 inhabitants (i.e., 21.54%), while in December 1938, i.e. before their state-organised displacement from Slovakia, only 16.77% (i.e., 20,764 inhabitants).

<sup>5</sup> In the 1929 parliamentary elections, the autonomists from the People's Party won 13.4% and those from the Czechoslovak Party 48.5% of the votes. In the 1935 elections, the autonomist bloc fell just below 10%.

<sup>6</sup> Novosti Bratislavy I, 12. 9. 1952, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> The 'final plan for Podhradie' was presented in 1957. A neighbourhood with 870 flats, a panoramic cinema, a state conservatory, the Slovak Philharmonics, a cultural-educational centre, a boatmen's house, two kindergartens, a secondary school, a creche, playgrounds, an international hotel, cafés, a confectionery, gardens, terraces, etc. were planned to be built in the small area between the Castle Hill and the Danube River (Bútora, 2011, p. 172). The project was not carried out.

<sup>8</sup> Ferenčuhová, S.: Meno, mesto, vec, p. 98.

<sup>9</sup> Novosti Bratislavy II, 1953, no. 32, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Bútora, I.: Kto zbúral Podhradie, p. 164.

<sup>11</sup> Electric shavers, irons, coffee machines, tea makers, cutlery, eau de Cologne, fountain pens, and other items will be imported from the USSR; toys and knitted goods from the GDR; dress fabrics from China; coats and jackets from Bulgaria, etc.

<sup>12</sup> Večerník I., 3, 1956, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Večerník, II, 114, 1957, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Roman-Catholic priest Andrej Hlinka chaired the Slovak People's Party, which won the elections in Slovakia towards the end of the interwar republic period.

<sup>15</sup> Day of the liberation of the city by the Soviet Army.

<sup>16</sup> The Bolshevik coup in Russia (1917) was celebrated on November 7 as the Great October Socialist Revolution.

<sup>17</sup> <http://prusajiri.blog.idnes.cz/c/174751/Slovník-realneho-socialismu-pismeno-Z.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Novosti Bratislavy II., 4 December 1953, No. 50, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Večerník I., 17 December 1956, No. 68, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Novosti Bratislavy II., 04 December 1953, No. 50, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Electric shavers, irons, coffee machines, tea makers, cutlery, eau de Cologne, fountain pens, and other items will be imported from the USSR; toys and knitted goods from the GDR; dress fabrics from China; coats and jackets from Bulgaria, etc.

<sup>22</sup> Moore, Niamh M., « Globalising Dublin: Indicators of an Urban Society in Transition », in *Dela*, n° 21, 2004, pp. 214.

<sup>23</sup> Lewellen, Ted C., *The Anthropology of Globalization. Cultural Anthropology Enters the 21st Century*. Westport – London: Bergin&Garvey, 2002, p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> Falčan, Lubomír, « Bratislava – problémy súčasného rozvoja (reflexia socio-priestorových súvislostí) », in *Sociológia*, n° 4, 2009, pp. 335, 334.

<sup>26</sup> In 1967, 112 houses, the synagogue, the conservatory, the public library, the brewery, and some other buildings were identified as the one to be demolished.

<sup>27</sup> Source: <http://www.old.bapodhradie.sk/index.php?action=4>.

<sup>28</sup> Vagač, M. (2003). Občianska iniciatíva Obnovme Podhradie. In: <http://old.bapodhradie.sk/>.

<sup>29</sup> Huba, M. Obnovme Podhradie – s ľuďmi a pre ľudí. Online: <http://www.obycajni ochranari.sk>. Questionnaire from the year 2003.

<sup>30</sup> TASR 5.1.2008. In: Aké bude bratislavské podhradie? Online: [www.dobrodruh.sk](http://www.dobrodruh.sk).

<sup>31</sup> Ako si predstavujete budúcnosť bratislavského Podhradia? Online: [www.tema.pravda.sk](http://www.tema.pravda.sk).

<sup>32</sup> Source: <http://bratislava.sme.sk/c/3590744/vydricka-nemoze-byt-historicka-tvrdi-slachta.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Source: <http://bratislava.sme.sk/diskusie/1957848/3/Vydricka-Hrad-nezakryje-tvrdi-investor.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Source: <http://www.old.bapodhradie.sk/index.php?action=4>.

<sup>35</sup> [www.old.bapodhradie.sk/index.php?action=4](http://www.old.bapodhradie.sk/index.php?action=4), online 12. 12. 2010.

<sup>36</sup> The complex was created at Vajnorská Street within the undeveloped area of former Pásienky in 1999–2001.

<sup>37</sup> The shopping centre was built on free land next to Janko Kráľ Park in 2000–2001.

<sup>38</sup> Leontievová, T. Od Temže k Dunaju a späť. Source: [www.asb.sk](http://www.asb.sk).

<sup>39</sup> The Slovak Television building in Mlynská dolina (108m), Technopol (90m), and Incheba (86 m) in Petržalka, Hviezda (commonly known as Kukurica) at Račianska Street (82m).

<sup>40</sup> A building with a height of over 150 metres is considered a skyscraper; according to others, 100 metres is enough. Eurovea planned an approx. 150m building, Twin City 138m, Lipový Park 131m, Slovany 130m; the highest building Klingierka (157m) was planned to be built at Mlynské Nivy.

<sup>41</sup> Located between Karadžičova, Landererova, Košická, and Mlynské Nivy Streets.

<sup>42</sup> Exhibitions, seminars, workshops presenting contemporary architecture, design, and art, as well as cultural and music events are organised there.

<sup>43</sup> Source: [www.petrzalka.otvorene.sk](http://www.petrzalka.otvorene.sk).

<sup>44</sup> Železnej studničke hrozí výstavba, obavy majú aj bežci. TASR, 21 March 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Press release: Najvyšší súd zrušil územné rozhodnutie..., 14 January 2010.  
Source: [www.park.estranky.sk](http://www.park.estranky.sk).

<sup>46</sup> Press release: Park Belopotockého by sa dal ešte zachrániť, 27 April 2012.  
Source: [www.park.estranky.sk](http://www.park.estranky.sk).

<sup>47</sup> Stav kauzy parku Belopotockého a jeho nádej na záchranu. 9 March 2014.  
Source: [www.park.estranky.sk](http://www.park.estranky.sk).

<sup>48</sup> Šafárikovo námestie (Šafárikovo Square) in the city centre is located close to MY Tesco, next to 'Manderlák'.

<sup>49</sup> Refers to the building complex of OD Prior and Hotel Kyjev of 1960.

<sup>50</sup> Začal sa súboj o Kamenné námestie. Aktivisti vidia nebezpečný precedens.  
Source: <https://aktualne.centrum.sk>.

<sup>51</sup> The size of the interference with the public space is indicated by the plan of building garages with a capacity for 318 cars.

<sup>52</sup> Source: [www.bratislava.sme.sk/diskusie](http://www.bratislava.sme.sk/diskusie).

<sup>53</sup> Source: [bratislava.sme.sk](http://bratislava.sme.sk), 29 October 2012.

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