

NEVER NEVER SCHOOL 2018

Urban dialogue with post-socialist city

How do former socialist neighbourhoods react to changing policies and the economic system?

How can they be fulfilling places to live and not just places to sleep?

Can new utopias meaningfully respond to old ones?

The following collection of essays, utopias and other contributions is based on our research of the panel housing estate Ťahanovce in Košice during Never Never School 2018.

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Introduction

Zuzana Révészová, Viktória Mravčáková,
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The summertime Never Never School started as an idea from within our collective. Frustration arose in some of us due to over-practical projects and tasks in our day-to-day lives and we certainly missed some space for thinking freely. We needed to develop our critical perspective and untie ourselves from expectations of institutions, the public and ourselves leading to practical, purposeful and product-oriented results.

We wanted to develop new forms of interdisciplinary collaborative practice. The question was simple: Is it possible to create interdisciplinary cooperation in such a way that other, related disciplines or spaces in-between them can contribute with their views? We've been in search of such collaborations that encompassed all our specialisations and disciplines and simultaneously were able to make us all feel comfortable. This was a way to discuss certain alternative realities built upon the ideals of equality and consideration on topics that are central to our society. We understand this reality to be a possible and desired future.



Utopias Answer the Utopias

There was no will and space left in the Central European Region after 1989 for the discussion about a possible future in city planning. Utopian thinking was rejected as a dangerous tool of the (authoritarian) regimes since the common understanding of a utopia is an enclosed construct of the worlds without any connection to the surrounding and customary realities. This inability to imagine other futures is also distinctly connected with the specific planning practice that ruled out any state interventions. On the other hand, the possibilities for us, as city creators and planners, have shrunk to the minimum.

Picturing the present Central European cities, one must admit they have been formed, to a degree, by the successful materialisation of modernist planning utopias. Housing estates represent the effort of the previous regime of the Czechoslovak socialist republic to re-create classless societies and collective and healthy living space. We could certainly argue about the success of this effort. The summer school brought up the question, whether it is possible to even approach the imperfect relics of utopian visions in a purely pragmatic way. While their nature lies in a specific utopian idea of societal behaviour, why not use utopia when thinking about their futures again?

We understand the limits of traditional reflection on utopias. They are often distorting and bringing them to the real world tends to make them unfinished caricatures of themselves. Keeping this in mind, we searched for more reality-based and space-based ways of designing. The alternative world does not necessarily need to be in the contrast with the customary reality (as is often the case of traditional utopias) but rather to build upon its principles. We aimed to create utopias collectively, which would indicate the yearning for different and more desirable futures, methods of organising city life and space based on the societal and technological predispositions which, in the end, make it possible (more on the subject can be found in texts of Pinder (2015) or Dunne & Raby (2013)).

The particular example of Ťahanovce housing estate offered a convenient space for this kind of thought process. Spaces of specific colour code and topography with their own mythology clash with a generic and technicist approach to planning, where the widths of the courtyards were defined by crane track dimensions. Since its construction, no planner has touched the densest neighbourhood in Slovakia (apart from some facade reconstructions). We considered this continuous deterioration in contrast with the changing lifestyles of its inhabitants as a field worth researching.

School as a Way of Life

The 'zero' year of the summer school was an intensive five-day collective experience. Participants signed in via an open call and brought a wide spectrum of expertise and approaches. They co-created the environment, where no one is the leader, everyone is responsible and where people can learn from each other. Creating a cosy atmosphere was an important element that nurtured mutual learning and trust-building. Common workspace, mutual care through open communication or rituals, such as common breakfasts, helped to create a space of intensive work as well as time for informal talk and privacy.

Common time was structured, but also provided enough space for individual suggestions and collective decisions, strongly influencing the course of the whole summer school. The first part of the Never Never School focused on research and data collection concerning the site, as well as discussions about post-socialist housing and planning. Invited experts, whose texts are also part of this publication, supervised the discussions. Reconciling the interdisciplinary perspectives allowed for following a common vision and utopia designing practice based on the collective observations. The second part embedded the knowledge in the local context using local initiatives and activists that took part in the program. Public events, such as film screening, discussion and exhibition were also an important element of summer school.

Particular methods, such as urban coding, scenarios or impersonations from the neighbourhood were performed in very different ways by each group of participants. The final presentation of designed utopias fulfilled its intention to grasp the current state of the neighbourhood. This short publication presents them in a state they were designed during the summer school. Three groups worked on three scenarios for the utopian future of the Ťahanovce neighbourhood. They can be seen as an analytical commentary to today's planning discourse as well as an intervention in the discussion about the future of the site. This discussion is also framed within the first text – a sum-up in a form of urban codes that are a collection of findings and interpretations about the current state of the housing estate. The results of the summer school are followed by four texts of invited experts, such as Lynda Zein, Jana Kočková, Mišo Hudák or Nika Dubrovsky framing the discourse in this publication.



Urban codes

A visit to the housing estate left us with many impressions. We have translated these into urban codes, which characterize Ľahanovce. Urban codes are represented with a brief description. Based on these codes, we defined 10 abstract themes that represent Ľahanovce: aesthetic, decay, infrastructure, isolation, mythology, orientation, public space, reclaim, surveillance, transport. Individual urban codes can also fall into several categories.

We used the coding method to sort and unify the impressions in the collective. The inspiration for this method was a book by Anne Mikoleit and Moritz Purckhauer *Urban Code, 100 Lessons for Understanding the City*. The list of urban codes presented here is not final and has no ambition to describe the real picture of the housing estate. These urban codes irritate only the first impressions of a Never Never School collective. During the summer school, these codes served as a test of a coding method as well as an intermediate step to collective design.



Poor Accessibility

People use the roads that are already there differently than originally intended. One has to armour themselves in order to overcome difficult physical barriers and get to the destination.

#orientation #public space #infrastructure

The Big Tahanovce

Anywhere you are, somebody can see you, somebody can control what you do. In the narrow spaces between the panel houses, one can't talk to not be heard by a neighbour.

#surveillance #public space

Anarchy parking

Parking is everywhere. Despite the rules. Cars can park anywhere, without a fine. In the middle of the street and on the pavement.

#infrastructure #public space #transport

Urban Labyrinth

The urban plan is based on a repetition of two kinds of spaces. This repetitiveness creates a seemingly never-ending labyrinth of structures that look alike.

It is not so hard to get lost in it.

#aesthetic #orientation #public space

Car Dormitory

Commonly, there are up to three cars per household. The lack of parking space at night is a frequent topic of conversation here. Even more frequent than small talk about the weather.

#aesthetic #public space #transport

Underground Infrastructure

The other Tahanovce. Smooth maintenance, repairs, improvements. The legend says that the original plans included wide maintenance tunnels under the housing estate. This way, everyday life and order would not need to be disturbed.

#infrastructure #mythology #public space

Road to Nowhere

The unfinished road serves as a parking space for the buses. The original plans certainly didn't account for the occasional illegal car races.

#aesthetic #infrastructure #public space #reclaim #transport

Isolation

The settlement is physically separated from the city. It is on a hill near the village, connected to the rest of Košice by only one expressway.

#infrastructure #isolation #transport

Lack of Benches

It is not possible to sit outside, there are no benches.

#public space

Only the Chavs Sit

Almost nobody sits on the very few benches. Only the chavs*.

* "Stands for Council House affiliated Vermin, is a person who stands outside McDonald's all the time but doesn't have enough money to actually go in. If you don't know what a chav looks like, go to your park and look for a bench, there will be a flock of the creatures." <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Chav>
#aesthetic #public space

Lack of Parks

The public spaces are in a very poor state. The vegetation is hanging by a thread. Even playgrounds are built on asphalt or concrete. Do you want to sit in a park? Go to the city centre.

#aesthetic #public space

CCTV

Some residents installed their own security cameras. There is not much-unmonitored space left.

#public space #surveillance

Pavement Parking

Two wheels on the pavement, two wheels on the grass. An unspoken rule. In such situations, people are used to walking either on the road or on the curb.

The stronger wins.

#infrastructure #public space #reclaim #transport

Déjà vu

All the spaces and buildings have a similar shape and colour. Though they individually do change, at first sight, they remain the same.

It feels like you have been there before.

#aesthetic #orientation #public space

Diversity in Homogeneity

Although the buildings look quite the same, people in each of the households are different. It is possible to see it on the curtain design, window flowers...

Need for self-expression in standardised pre-fab structure.

#aesthetic #reclaim

Wild Living

Nature is reclaiming space. Its power is destroying the standardisation mainly in the places that were left unfinished.

#aesthetic #decay #public space #reclaim

Car-Friendly

You are very much invited to ride your car everywhere, to ensure you better comfort and accessibility to your home. The bus passes only through three parallel streets so without a car you would have to navigate through the urban jungle.

#infrastructure #public space #transport

Colour of Concrete

The extraordinary sunset orange colour palette of Tahanovce is visible from far away. It makes for a specific atmosphere and creates a sense of identity.

#aesthetic #orientation

Building as an Address

With no streets, each building is an address – officially and unofficially.

#orientation #public space

Poor Maintenance

Hairlike cracks in panels are not a design element. They are a sign of a defect caused by the rapid construction of the housing estate in the past and a desire to mend it quickly and cheaply.

#aesthetic #decay

Sharp Prefabs vs. Round Churches

Specific architecture brought about by the 90s helps to distinguish between old and new, collective and individual.

#aesthetic #orientation



Ťahanovce future scenarios

This chapter represents the group work of the School's last two days. Three future scenarios were developed and are presented here in a shortened form.

Ťahanovce United, the Art Experiment

Viliam Fedorko, Tomáš Jančarík, Eva Jenčuráková, Jana Kočková,
Zuzana Tabačková

In the elections in the early 2000s, a group of artists and enthusiasts from Slovakia and beyond organized themselves and elected a mayor, who was 'one of them', in order to turn Ťahanovce into a place of experiment, art and resilience – a hipster paradise. It wasn't difficult to gather enough voters, due to the traditionally low participation in the elections. A number of new permanent residents did the trick. The new mayor, together with the new residents started a process of radical change. After a successful referendum, the neighbourhood separated itself from Košice and became the youngest (not just in population) town of Slovakia. The village of Ťahanovce also joined, as the inhabitants saw this as an opportunity for a long-desired financial and operational autonomy. A manifesto was created and the new town – Ťahanovce United turned into a cooperative with an ambitious vision and no cars.

MANIFEST

- #YOU DON'T NEED A CAR IN ŤAHANOVCE.
- #WE ARE A PART OF THE WORLD, WE CARE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT.
- #DEEP INSIDE, WE ARE ALL ARTISTS.
- #TOGETHER WE ARE STRONGER.
- #BACK TO OUR ROOTS.
- #SHARING IS CARING.
- #DO IT YOURSELF, GOVERN IT YOURSELF.
- #DO LESS WITH LESS.™
- #HAPPINESS IS ONLY REAL WHEN SHARED.
- #GROW IT YOURSELF.
- #CITY TO THRIVE IN, NOT DRIVE IN.
- #WHERE SUN IS MISSING THERE IS ART.
- #ALL POWER TO IMAGINATION.



“I am the mayor of Ľahanovce United. Three years ago, I applied through an open call with my portfolio. Based on this I was elected by the citizens of Ľahanovce to become the ‘mayor’. One of the most significant aspects of our home is that we have zero private cars tolerance inside of Ľahanovce United. All hard surfaces protected this way we consider skateboardable. Art is one of the most important values for Ľahanovce United, because we believe that deep inside everyone is an artist. We are trying to employ art in every possible place. We follow the rule „where the sun is missing, there is always art“. It means that we use the potential of the sun in the most efficient way. Every facade illuminated by the sun, if possible, is used for vertical gardening, general greenery or as a source of electricity.” explains Vilo, the mayor of Ľahanovce United.

Although still part of Slovakia, Ľahanovce United found a way to become a place of the radical experiment while building up on its original mythology – a concept that attracted many artists, scientists, thinkers and doers from Europe and beyond, while also pushing out many of its original residents not accepting the new way of life. One could say that Ľahanovce gentrified itself, but thanks to the high private ownership rate and a reintroduced collectiveness, the generated value was redistributed among its old and new residents and those who decided to leave were thus paid out their share. This tight-knit community is not a place for everyone, but there are plenty of other places in the world and the train station is just a bike ride away.

THČ Research Centre

Tereza Haumerová, Juraj Mazák, Katarína Onderková, Lucie Vrbová, Katarína Zaťková, Lynda Zein

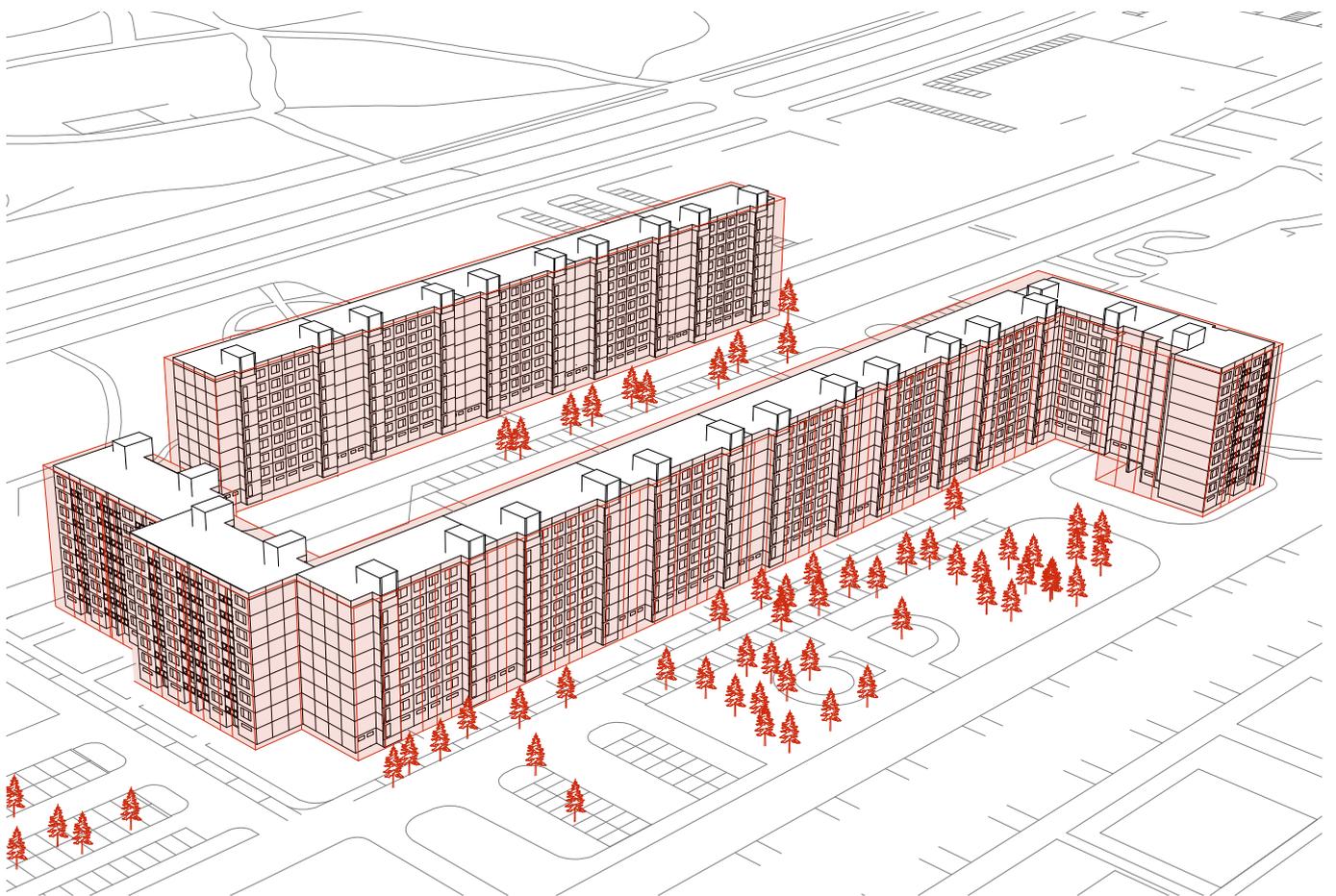


In the beginning, there were three young architects – Katarína, Lynda, Katka, and a young sociologist Lucie. Together, they established an initiative called THČ / 'Teraz – hneď – čokoľvek' = 'Now – Immediately – Anything' / in Ťahanovce, the biggest panel housing estate in eastern Slovakia. Their first 'kick-ass' project was an online social platform. Locals could register there as 'Good idea providers' or as 'Space donors'. Providers and donors made an agreement based on online community voting. That's how some good ideas beneficial to the community were implemented. For instance, there was a group of young skaters who had no place where they could skateboard and meet each other. An old lady gave them her cellar, where they established a club for young people. They didn't have to pay rent, however, they paid by providing skateboard lessons for kids on Fridays and at weekends. They also began to organize one-day summer camps for kids later on.

After five years, THČ initiated the establishment of a local cooperative and prepared a business plan, aiming to bring 5000 jobs into Ťahanovce. The plan dealt with the insulation issue and unsuitable spatial conditions of flats. Another objective of the project was to provide new local possibilities concerning jobs and services, hence, getting rid of the suburban character of Ťahanovce. After negotiations with the city, a large sum of tax and contribution money was invested to support new local projects. Tereza, one of the locals, explains: "You are not afraid to put your own

money into the project, which is bringing the improvement of life conditions to all that are involved.” The first supported project was the local sawmill with a small practice centre built next to the Ťahanovce forest. On that account, a lot of locals gained the necessary knowledge and started working in the field of forestry, logging and carpentry. Their expertise was used in the insulation of flats which used wooden construction coated in polycarbonate plates.

Currently, 15 years from the start of the project, THČ is a research centre offering an educational programme focused on insulation processes for the still uninsulated panel housing estates. Experts from Slovakia and abroad come to Ťahanovce and attend this practical learning programme to acquire the skills and knowledge, which helped Ťahanovce in the field of local progress, as well as in the development of insulation systems and refurbishment of panel housing estates. Last year, the Ťahanovce insulation research centre started investing in experiments concerning recycling systems of EPS foam, which has been the primary insulation material in the past.



Ťahanovce 2084

Alessandro Granata, Jakub Havlík, Joanna Lickiewicz, Viktória Mravčáková,
Karolína Plášková, Zsofi Szöke

Autumn 2018. Ťahanovce is home to almost 10 % of Košice's population, yet its inhabitants feel neglected continuously by the city officials. Problems with public transportation, traffic, the inefficiency of services and public spaces have not been solved for decades, and the taxes paid to the municipality never seem to be invested back in the district. The scepticism towards public administration is growing and the voices concerning fiscal autonomy start to rise with the upcoming elections. The front-runner for the mayoral elections is straightforward and does not mince words. Because of the critical circumstances in Ťahanovce, it is clear that a change is inevitable! The situation asks for autonomy, minimising the taxes, cutting the public intervention, the establishment of the parking rights, privatisation of land and services and guarantee of individual freedom. Other promises are deemed insincere and condemned to lose. Long live hyper-liberalism!



The free market is a new faith.
Private ownership is sacred.
There's no alternative to the competitive model.
The laws of the market are valid absolutely.
No social ethics can set limits to the free market.

To achieve a bright future for Ľahanovce, some corrective actions have been necessary: Associations of co-owners are dissolved, real estates sold up. Residents claim and seize private parking spaces. Everything can be monetized, services such as educational facilities, police, healthcare or transportation are privatized. The local board of representatives is dismissed. The politics of laissez-faire set the new trend. Any construction policy is eliminated, development restrictions do not apply. "Imagine, you would wake up to this sight every morning. Well, I have the most beautiful flat on the block. You can see it from the outside too. I have windows made from mirror glass. I own three cars and park them in front of my house. I decorated them with stickers and stuff. My wife loves to knit so we put some knitted blankets in the windows. I like pistachio colour, it is fresh and makes me feel like I am in nature. I have the nicest balcony too, my wife has lots of flowers there. I can't look outside anymore, because everybody has made their own style. So it is a complete collage of things. Crazy what people do!" a local businessman elaborates. There are no limits to individual freedom. It is the year 2084, it is the New Time.



The Utopia of Affordable Housing

Jana Kočková



The concept of utopia is used in both academic and non-academic discourse, while its clear definition is disappearing. Usage in different contexts paired with boundaries that are dissolving and transforming due to the very nature of utopia adds to the predicament. In general, utopia can be described as heaven on Earth or an unreal reality, but it is most often described as an ideal place in the legal, political, and social system. A fictional place where everything is perfect. In the classical utopian texts of Thomas More (1978), Tommaso Campanella (1979), Robert Owen (1960), and Charles Fourier (1983) the utopia is described as a city that represents the centre of social and industrial progress and cultural maturity. It is a perfectly designed and constructed space that allows the existence of a perfect society (Vacková 2010).

Studies of post-socialist cities describe the concept of utopia much more clearly. Utopian, which stands for an ideal and at the same time unattainable, or, the opposite, failed and dystopic, often refers to a socialist city or its parts. A socialist city is the city of the future. It is portrayed as healthy, clean, sunlit, and green. In addition to an unwavering belief in technological progress, it also demonstrates a belief in the cultural development of the new man (Vesely 2014: 81). Thus, the socialist city offers a vision of a better, technologically advanced future, a place of abundance for a modern socialist man,¹ where people are equal and learn to coexist. From what we know from history, our socialist cities have not reached this point, which can be explained by the theory of utopia and ideology by Karl Mannheim (1991).

1 "...a utopian, science-fiction-inflected vision of the socialist future" (Rubin 2008: 603).

According to Mannheim, both represent a certain interpretation of reality, a form of false consciousness. On one hand, utopias are produced by the groups that currently lack power, on the other hand, ideology is used by ruling groups to stabilize social reality. Utopists, therefore, seek to change the social and power conditions (Vacková 2010). For Mannheim (1991), it is relatively complicated to distinguish between ideological and utopian cognition of the world; the boundary between these two concepts is vague, obscure, and often also volatile. Ideology transforms into utopia and vice versa by changing the point of view, by changing the historical perspective. That which is understood as utopia today can become a reality in the future. Rather than a type, it is a level (Vacková 2009: 10-20) or a degree of utopism.

Contemporary authors perceive socialist cities similarly and often reference housing estates as a typical example of socialist utopian construction. Rubin (2007; 2016) demonstrates on the example of a Berlin housing estate the utopian concept of the ideal society that is connected with such dwellings, but also their dystopian character, caused by the unlimited and all-pervading power of the state (Rubin 2016). Similarly, Dunu (2018: 127) describes socialist precast concrete estates as either a courageous yet unsuccessful utopia or, conversely, a dystopia with a flash of hope in its essence, even though he immediately rejects this disparity as purely theoretical. In reality, the issue is very complex, and one shall not encounter absolute polarities, therefore dividing reality into utopia and dystopia for the sake of its description is irrelevant. He proposes to consider the relationship between utopia and dystopia not as opposites, but as two sides of the same coin.

The following text focuses on the question of the utopia / dystopia / ideology of a socialist city, how it has transformed throughout history, and in what state can it be found today.

Where has the idea of affordable housing for everyone disappeared?

The origin of socialist utopia (or dystopia) was not at all accidental, nor was it the result of socialist politics. The development of this utopia was, in fact, linked to the philosophical ideas associated with the end of the 19th century. What we have experienced in the last century can be described as the culmination and spatial embodiment of long-term socio-political aspirations (Dunu 2018: 119).

The idea of social housing for workers or socially disadvantaged people has been emerging in Europe since the end of the 19th century when the first unique housing projects appeared. The first city-funded social housing for poor families in what is now Slovakia appeared in 1913 (Moravčíková 2011). Its purpose was to provide affordable housing and ensure a particular standard of living providing a healthy environment for those who could not reach it on their own. However, precast concrete panel structures are not an invention of post-war socialist governments. One of the first precast concrete structures in Europe emerged in the Netherlands and Germany in the early decades of the 20th century, followed by France and Scandinavia. In Czechoslovakia, precast concrete technology was also tested in the interwar period by the Baťa company (Zarecor 2011).

The left-wing oriented interwar avant-garde movement formulated The Athens Charter in the 1930s, which described the principles of architectural modernity. For the avant-garde architects of this period, the question of public housing was crucial. They dealt with issues of providing dignified, hygienic, economically, and environmentally acceptable housing for all people living in the ever-expanding cities. Nonetheless, these utopian ideas did not flourish at the time and are remembered only as solitary projects, agitation texts, and experiments (Šimáček, Szczyrba, Andráško, Kunc 2015).

Left-wing ideas of architectural modernity have finally evolved into an ideology in the post-war years, made possible mainly by the state ownership of the land and the industries. Architects applied the principles of the Athens Charter particularly in the planning of housing estates, where they, for example, tried to divide a town into zones based on their function – residence, work, relaxation, and transport. They further expanded the concept by removing the classic city streets and explored the concept of a vertical garden town (Howard 1902) with its own centre offering services and civic facilities (Janto 2015). Both architects and politicians were very optimistic about the future and believed in the possibility of an egalitarian society. However, the housing situation in emerging socialist states was unenviable. Creating a classless society and an ideal city was definitely a problem, but solving the housing shortage proved even more difficult. Not only did the aftermath of the war reveal a critical shortage of flats, but most of the existing flats were in unsatisfactory hygienic condition. In East Germany, more than 60 % of flats didn't include showers and toilets (Sammartino 2018). The situation was similar in Hungary (Molnar 2013) and Czechoslovakia, where approximately half of the flats had running water and one third had a toilet. At the same time, all the flats were overpopulated, even according to the heretofore hygiene standards (Veselý 2014). It was, therefore, necessary to resolve the housing crisis quickly, efficiently, and ideologically correct. The idea of affordable and functional living has been maturing in Europe for half a century, into what would become a mass construction of housing for the general public, not just a working class. The housing crisis affected the entire society and solving it also created an opportunity to eliminate class differences. After a short wave of experiments at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, a typical construction of panel housing estates began with the use of industrialization, prefabrication, standardization, and modernization. Mostly modest and unfortunate housing estates were the result of several requirements: equality and the increase of living, spatial and hygienic standards of the inhabitants (Veselý 2014). The concept of universality has proven to be the best method for the practical implementation of large-scale production, but also to be one of the most problematic aspects. The need for flats, mass production, and the demand for equality of basic living conditions meant that the question of housing became the main subject of the architecture of the 20th century (Moravčíková 2012) and that it became an integral part of socialist ideology.

The dystopian reality of housing estates

At the same time, at the very beginning of the realization of the housing projects, the true nature of a utopia, that is, its unattainability became apparent.

“It is evident that in practice, the construction of panel housing estates fell behind the noble goals of inter-war modernist urbanism in many respects. Not only was the project impossible because of poor economic situation in the Czechoslovak state, but at the same time it was not the primary goal for any of the governments, which sought to overcome the serious housing crisis as quickly and cheaply as possible” (Veselý 2014).²

In addition, architects had no previous experience in this type of construction work and therefore had to base their concepts on theoretical hypotheses that did not correspond to reality. Different partial solutions appeared to be very attractive and desirable, but practical applications soon showed that some problems were removed only to be replaced with the new ones (Šimáček, Szczyrba, Andráško, Kunc 2015). The whole construction of the housing estates was often accompanied by problems such as lack of resources or material and labour shortages and construction delays. Often, the first inhabitants had to wait several years for the completion of the infrastructure and services. Even today, some of the originally planned civic facilities remain unfinished (Veselý 2014; Zarecor 2017). Instead of utopian garden towns, a “special mixture of industrialism, socialist principles and principles of modern architecture” (Musil 2002: 281) created a housing estate, criticized mainly for its monotony, constructional and design errors, monofunctionality and therefore the lack of service (Janto 2015). Even the ideas of affordable housing and equality between the people have not been fully achieved. As described by Szelényi (1983), the pace of housing construction in large industrial cities fell behind urbanization, and the flat was still a precious commodity during the 1980s, mostly accessible only to middle-class members, intelligentsia, professionals, and people with acquaintances, contrary to all declarations claiming the better affordability for all.

Is there room for a utopia after utopia?

(Naum, Mogos 2018: 7)

Or what a utopia could look like after experiencing the disappointment of socialism? Editors of the KAJET Journal explore this question in more detail in the thematic issue devoted to socialist utopia / dystopia (2018). According to Mannheim's (1991) concept of utopia, one could expect that, after the collapse of the communist regimes, the ruling ideologies will once again gradually turn towards utopia. The idea of affordable, state-guaranteed and hygienic housing will, over the years, become a utopian form of false consciousness and people will demand a change in social reality. However, such a vision does not seem to be widely shared, even though our society faces another housing crisis. The collective utopia of communism has been

² Own translation from the Czech original: “Je zřejmé, že v praxi výstavba panelových sídlišť za ušlechtilými cíli meziválečného modernistického urbanismu v mnoha ohledech značně pokulhávala. Jejich bezpodmínečné dosažení nejenže nebylo v ekonomických možnostech československého státu, ale ani nepředstavovalo prvořadý cíl tehdejších vlád. Ty v první řadě usilovaly o co nejrychlejší a co nejméně nákladné překonání vážné bytové krize” (Veselý 2014).

demystified and fragmented into countless private utopias. The desire for a utopian society has fallen apart. While there existed notions of an achievable ideal future in the past, the social imagination has changed over time. The ideas of socialist utopia evaporated and became a ghost. Post-communism is now, paradoxically, anti-utopian and completely deprived of prospects (Mogos 2018).

Chelcea and Druță (2016) claim that the post-socialist capitalism, which we currently experience, is not built on ruins of communism, but has been raised and maintained by the powerful victors of the economic transformation who use communism as a scarecrow to discipline the workforce and force them to give up their claims for social justice (Poenaru 2013; Simonica 2012). The actual and prestigious socialist past is now 'zombielike' (hence the term 'zombie socialism') and works as an 'ideological antioxidant' (Žižek 2001 in Chelcea and Druță 2016) or, more precisely, as a 'utopian antioxidant'. What do we need to do to be able to re-imagine the East European future (Mogos 2018)? The first option would be to refrain from using terms such as post-communism and post-socialism (Ferenčuhová 2016; Gentile 2017). This concept makes it impossible for us to see our cities in their continuity and historical context (Ferenčuhová 2016, Hirt 2016) and thus inhibits our ability to perceive the utopia of affordable housing as something that existed before socialism and should exist after it. The concept of post-socialist city inadvertently creates artificial limits for our imagination (Gentile 2017). Ruling classes and power elites promote an antisocialist interpretation of reality where it is impossible to reflect critically on the socialist housing policy, its contradictions, its ideals or its consequences due to aversion to socialism.

One won't get close to understanding the current housing crisis and its possible origins while swaying between the nostalgia left by the previous regime and the total rejection of it. Kahl (2003 in Sammartino 2018) writes that the 1970's housing crisis in East Germany was so bad that people subjected all their personal lives to an attempt to get an apartment – they married or divorced, had children, or rather didn't have children, changed their jobs. Today, young people find themselves in a similar situation where they often have no choice but to take a mortgage and for 30 years submit their lifestyle to the repayment schedule. Then there is another group of inhabitants who don't even reach the rental housing (due to discrimination, high deposit for the apartment, etc.), live in hygienically unsuitable conditions or on the street. In our society, homelessness is something normal and generally accepted. In an effort to solve this problem, the unique utopians encounter a wave of resistance – the righteous anger of residents, who feel that nobody cares about their housing problems (e.g., the Rapid Re-housing project in Brno). Hence, what does the long-dead utopia of available housing and the associated historical experience offer in terms of a solution? First of all, it suggests that the problem of housing is not only related to homelessness, but it also affects much wider society. There is, however, no universal solution because different people have different needs, preferences and lifestyles that need to be taken into account. Nonetheless, we can base our work on plenty of up-to-date housing research projects and analyses (such as Samec 2018, Sunega, Lux 2018) that can help steer us from forming unrealistic plans.

Utopia of affordable housing in the sense of a shared vision is possible if we don't let ourselves be discouraged by the memory of socialist dystopia / unfinished utopia / ideology embodied in panel housing estates, but if we find inspiration in it. The dystopia tells us more about our own limits than the nature of an unattained utopia (Naum 2018). We should therefore actively involve our imagination and picture a possible better world and how to achieve it, taking into account our limits. Yes, the housing estates have their faults, but so do we.

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On Binariness

Utopias are powerful tools.
Dream or fear.

Essay

Lynda Zein

Dystopia

Painting dystopian pictures of existing situations is useful in order to reveal and realize our own realities and their potential threats through mere enhancement of how we live. In Huxley's *Brave New World* from 1932, for example, one can find a world where rationalisation, efficiency and conditioning are pushed to their artificial maximum with the aim of bringing lasting happiness to the people – to the extent of a gigantic machine hatching modified citizens. In 1984, probably the most well known dystopian novel, George Orwell denounces control of society through space, language and technology, which predicted the scope of mass surveillance people experience today, in the digital era. In the *Black Mirror* TV series, one of the currently most popular contemporary dystopian representations created by Charlie Brooker in 2011, the role and the importance people give to technology in regulating lives and social, political and economical structures are questioned.

These images enable the viewers to understand humanity to some extent: through portraying technology solely as an exaggerated representation of our weakest aspects, we can grasp our limits. In the case of *Black Mirror*, the viewer understands the critique shown in the dystopia, as the chosen heightened attributes come from a reality that they know. Those are familiar traits we find in ourselves, in society or in economics and politics, such as the need for constant production, the pursuit of efficiency and the desire for modernity, or even control.

Such critiques used in the dystopian exercise reveal current threats, which is something that is possible also in the context of urban realities, for example, in the mass housing estate. The postmodern critique of these housing estates and their elements, such as the notion of the 'big brother', lies in the social control induced by the established structure. The rationalisation and efficiency of large territories for the pursuit of optimal productivity can be found, for example, in the implementation of zoning and separation of the modes of transport. And finally, the role of technological progress under the Modernist era is shown on the venue of a new set of construction possibilities or with the transformation of the city by the motorway.

Utopia

In all of the mentioned dystopian observations, the aim is to reveal limits and underlying aspects of the palpable and the physical. Utopia works in a similar fashion towards changing the current status quo. But while a dystopia tries to predict what would happen if we continue to live the way we do and makes us question our own present and thus eventually provokes a change, a utopia invents and creates a new image that can open the viewers' eyes to how they could live and what they could aim to be.

Reinhold Martin, in an interview with Jonathan Crisman for the MIT journal *Thresholds* held in 2012, stated that utopia is a systemic change. From his description of a utopia, I can conclude that both utopia and dystopia point at crises in society and have the potential to change its prospects. In the case of mass housing, utopia aimed at changing the current status quo, i.e. tackling the lack of decent living conditions in the post-war era. But at the same time, this utopia created a new vision of the Modern city for the new Modern man. The tabula rasa was hence an important starting point. To follow up on that, the students of the research exhibition *Utopia's Ghost* led by Martin at the GSAPP in 2008 define utopia through concepts such as: being situated 'nowhere' as a tabula rasa; appearing as an island and connected to islands of the same kind – forming archipelagos; and finally working as a world within a world – the Russian doll phenomenon.

Today, grand urban entities like the New Urbanism, the housing estates and the gated communities could be perceived as touching upon several aspects of utopia. Firstly, a sense of nostalgia, such as in the New Urbanism movement which perceives an ideal urban form in the traditionalist city and works through replicated pastiche. Secondly, as laying on an artificial bubble for an ideal society based on the desire of exclusion from society, such as the gated community where people live among their social strata, sharing similar economical and symbolic capital, protected and separated from the problematic and unsafe society. And finally, a futurist vision of an ideal society and an ideal urban form for the common good, imagining cities where everyone has the right to housing, as promised by the social housing programmes. Utopia, though as I see it, is a static image of a certain lifestyle that is perceived as the right one, as the one to be desired. I will, therefore, try to analyse how both the nostalgia, as well as the stigmatisation of the panel housing territories have an impact on the present debate concerning the housing crisis.

Housing

An undeniable urge for an evidently lacking public housing might have heightened a certain level of nostalgia about the past Czech and Slovak housing projects. The housing crisis becomes accentuated due to an increase of the rent prices induced by sloppy urban policies which support all sorts of real-estate led masterplan projects and gentrifying 'revitalisation' plans. Atouristification accompanied by non-regulated Airbnb that prioritizes short-term rentals, which often put other tenants into precarious situations. Though, when nostalgia wraps itself around the need for a welfare state, it brings an entire set of socio-temporal references to the table, spreading way beyond the initial subject. It carries a visual narrative symbolising

quite a blurry time-lapse, psychologically linked to a mist of intertwined factors; this is what the ghost of utopia refers to. Even though nostalgia can be defined here as a simplified outlook on a specific aspect of a political era where the viewer chooses and focuses only on its positive impact — here the chosen aspect would be the public housing policies in socialist Czechoslovakia — it is the entire living condition under that era that will be put in relation along with it.

Thinking about Czechoslovakia as a welfare state which from the 1950s to 1990s provided decent housing for the masses through its urban policies would be very naive. This utopia existed in the real world only in its spoken, written and drawn forms – in its intention. Even when focusing on this intention, the scale, control and machine-like apparatus it operated, seems quite far from an ideal start.

One could also partly read this nostalgic discourse as a sort of protection of the existing urban structures from stereotypes and gentrification. A partly comforting idea is that the current discourse on panel housing estates in Slovakia and Czech Republic, through research exhibitions, seminars and articles, emerges in force and seems to be precise, complex and hence nuanced. This constructive but slightly dry historic narrative of the various five-year housing plans lives on, representing and reproducing the intentions of politicians, architects and urbanists of the era, in a more direct fashion. It also conveys, unconvincingly, the well-known postmodern critique of mass housing as being standardised, out of scale and excluded from cities. If we are to gain decent and respectful public housing and perceive it, as it should be, simply a responsibility of the State to provide it. Current rationalisation and aestheticization of a strong historical phase on the territory should remain critical and precise over the political discourse on social housing programmes that were leading to its realisation. Without these nuances, it will remain hard to jump into a contemporary emerging debate, and mostly impossible if we are to ignore the borderline absence of it.

Conclusion: less utopia, less dystopia

Given that a third of the population in Slovakia and the Czech Republic lives in panel houses, architects and urban planners can confidently ask for an updated debate on public housing and finally understand its present and its socio-economical and spatial situations. While the need for policies, as sketched before, stems from real deficiencies in housing provisions, the responses to the lack of decent housing can take up many forms. Though linking housing to this still fragile layer of the collective memory might inhibit the creativity and receptivity of society to face its current problems in an adequate manner. This is especially true in the Central East European context where, as to paraphrase Alamgir, we are still not able to accept our Socialist past and hence, the socio-democratic arguments do not work. This means that all the initiatives that are linked ideologically to a welfare state can be, based on past experience, cast aside. The cunning relationship with the past might discourage and narrow the mobilisation of the public opinion in pushing for a change. What's worse, it can lead to housing estate gentrification. I reckon moving away from the realms of dystopia and utopia can only benefit the current situation.

Moreover, the topic of utopia reminds us that there is paternalism embedded in the architectural profession. Its critique in 1989 completely dismantled the profession, and architecture was no longer welcome in dealing with social questions. After three

decades of the architectural profession, in practice and at universities focusing mainly on the search of aesthetics and plasticity, ignoring socio-political matters, architects slowly start to realise that architecture will remain the crystallisation of the societal structure into palpable form and hence will always be a mirror of our – clearly uneven – society. As the city is completely dependent on social processes which are in constant change, it is clear that the discussion needs to open up from a closed architectural, humanist or political field to become a public matter and practice. Architecture indeed reproduces social structures and has the ability to further enhance discrimination, separation, segregation and hierarchy between people. Participation could, therefore, help steer the public debate from questions related to aesthetics or public space, which is now in focus. The state should help develop better living conditions, social equality and dignity. Hence, the regulations of private development projects with the implementation of housing policy programmes should finally become a main topic of discussion.

Education and utopias

Interview with Nika Dubrovsky



You are an artist and lecturer combining the two through your project a4all, what is your concept of utopian education?

I wouldn't even use the word utopian because for me the ideal education is this very simple formula that every student or child has the right to decide when, where and with whom they are studying. And by chance throughout history, it was again and again shown that when the students are left alone and allowed to self-organize they create a clear concept where everything works. So it is not a utopia in any possible way. It is very efficient, cheap and very achievable in every economic reality.

How does a4all answer this ideal?

A4all is not in the position to answer, only to show different examples of how education could be arranged in different societies and at different times. And what is very interesting is that when you compare the different arrangements you see clearly that the framework in which we are trained throughout our lifetime, perceiving education as we know it as something normal, is actually completely abnormal. It is very suppressive and actually does not work. This Prussian model of schooling that is now combined with automation, anonymization and professionalization is actually not very different to the original one from the late 19th century. But there are many many other systems and ways of reproduction of culture throughout different communities and cultures but we kind of decided that they are very marginal for whatever reason.

What are some inspirational learning experiments?

One of the most inspirational ones that I've done was not about education, but about schools – 'What is school' – Somerset School. It is one of the most famous schools in the world now and is 90 years old. It is extremely successful. It's a small community of people who have allowed their kids to do whatever they want basically, so nobody forces them to take classes or learn if they don't want to. They are allowed to play all day long and it has been proven to be extremely beneficial for everybody involved. The only problem is that the school is very small and it is private, therefore rendering

this type of experiment very difficult to spread around. In the past five years, two million kids from two of India's states participated in another experiment where the design of the classroom was rearranged in the fashion of open democratic education. Children were allowed to choose their subjects, teachers were not in the position to teach them but in the position to help them. The teachers were trained not to stand in front of the class, so they brought carpets and allowed kids to sit anywhere they wanted to and put all the learning material on a wall in the class. It was clearly about the architecture of space, the design of space. Teachers were navigating the kids and were only allowed to interact with them when the kids wanted help. They didn't need any classes, they didn't need any program. And this was implemented on a big scale and unbelievably successful. The kids just went through the materials themselves and the drop out of the school was minimal. Everyone was happy, including the teachers, who were regarded as police officers before, became sort of friends for the children and on top of that, the students suddenly became successful.

What kind of values does the ideal education work with?

I think that the value of education is about care. Is about reproducing humans. And our current value as a teacher is about the reproduction of what we call knowledge. So it's about consuming as much information and recycling that. And at the end of the day, it's not necessarily connected with any actual human values or care for people. That's the fundamental difference. If you, for example, train to be an architect you have to acquire lots of special knowledge and stuff like that but I think in the traditional communities they will not study to be an architect because they will start figuring out how to build houses here and there from whatever is available for whoever needs it. So it will be a different aim and different arrangement and these are the different ways of approaching knowledge.

What is the relationship between teachers and students in a4all? What is the role of the teachers?

So the teacher, or in this case I would call them facilitators, should be interested in the question in the same way as the kids. It's just that the teacher has the resources or time or something else to provide more care and to facilitate the person or the workshop or some other collective affinity in the way that would lead everyone involved into coming up with answers for those questions. A4kids is coming from the belief that all these questions have very different answers in different cultures but we all have a very common aim: we need to answer them and we are all human. So in some way we are able to come to some sort of consensus about that because of our human reason. We can answer it from whoever we are.

What is the role of creativity in this ideal education model?

Personally, when I do the workshop, I like to draw, while some people don't. Creativity is not about some skills or some magic tools, it's more about the general framework when the people's values are there and the facilitators try to do their best to allow people to be who they are. And if you are comfortable in this situation, the kids will be able to do amazing things in their own way. And that is the principle of free democratic education that believes that if you provide children with the framework where they are allowed to do that, they will develop, no matter what. So they all will learn the right thing, whatever they need to learn. Much quicker than if you try to find some tricks.

Thirty Years

Mišo Hudák

My parents moved to Ťahanovce among the first inhabitants of the suburb, in the summer of 1988. I was five years old back then, and I managed the transition from a small flat to generous housing very well. The fact that half the kids on the block were approximately the same age as I was a big help.

I used to look at the cranes that have built the other half of Sofijská (Sofia) street and moved on to Varšavská (Warsaw) street in a few weeks. There is no better playground than a half-built suburb with poor safety measures and broken fences. I used to alternate between running around all the utility tunnels under the panel houses, playing hide and seek in hundreds of empty cellars, climbing in excavators and cranes, trips to the old shooting range in the forest, and the apple orchard next to the highway. I think I haven't been attending school yet. With my neighbour Tomáš, we used to create 'passports' and 'travel around the world' on bicycles, as the streets took the names of the world's capital cities.

I started attending school in class 1.F. There were so many children at the beginning of the nineties, that even after opening the second school, we took shifts in attending classes. One week in the morning, one week in the afternoon. I think that during the second year I was attending afternoon classes, starting with lunch. Hockey and football, but mostly hockey, was played in the street. A parking lot here and there popped out every year, but they were still very sparse.

Whether it was summer or winter, we would just check the weather through the window and hurry outside to play. We organized tennis, table tennis, or football tournaments. There was enough of us to fit several playgrounds. During wintertime, we waited in the queue for sleighing and poured water from hydrants on flat surfaces to be able to ice-skate.

There was a large hole in the ground on Varšavská (Warsaw) street, filled with water, which looked like a lake. Near the pond's bank was a half-drown external elevator that was used to paint the house facades. I have two scars from playing hockey on that frozen lake. Now you can unload the groceries from your trunk there, or something.

You could find a similar pond in the old Sahara. It was full of fine greasy sand and we used to pass through it on the way to the orchard. In summer, we used to stand around the water and chase dragonflies with stones to death... We could swim in one or the other pond on large styrofoam panels. But this place died at one point when a mall with an asphalt parking lot was built there. But, miraculously, it came back to life on the opposite side of the housing estate. That side will probably never be completed due to unsettled land claims.

The old Sahara was a clearer flatland which led to an apple orchard. The new Sahara is very different – has very little sand and suddenly transits from scattered brown-yellow-red earth patches into a dense forest.

Very early on, we established a hockey team Colorado and then wagered similar clubs in the suburb. There was a team at Varšavská (Warsaw) street, another one at Čínska (Chinese) street, or Berlínska (Berlin) street. We followed our older brothers who used to play big matches at a big spot at Belehradská (Belgrade) street. Ever since we could hold our hockey sticks, we played. Artis was a decent hockey stick brand, Bohemia prestigious. Tisa was hell, just glue and sawdust. Out of my first nineteen hockey sticks, at least thirteen were Tisa. Around the time I turned 9, I stopped counting.

Every summer, we used to play baseball. Whipping the ball behind the bushes secured the runner two bases. If the ball landed behind the road, all the way up to fourteen, it was a home run. We used a real baseball ball very rarely. We stopped using it altogether when we hit a bright green car with it once. There was still enough free space in the streets to create unlikely games and just have fun. The car still exists today and parks roughly in the same spot. However, now it has many more parking spots to choose from.

Our common suburban life changed the moment we started attending schools downtown. My new friends lived outside of Ťahanovce, in Kuzmányho neighbourhood, Moldavská street, and in a neighbourhood called Terasa. I began commuting to the city centre more often. The road was always the same – down the hill to the centre and then back up the hill, sweating. I used to bring letters to my first platonic love in a neighbouring housing estate, Furča. I found a direct path between the suburbs, across trees and bushes. I always carried the bike on the way there and fell off it about a hundred times on the way back.



I got hit by a car on the road that runs towards Furča and Ťahanovce, a long time before malls, and all the other aluminium boxes settled there. Until that moment, I had never used an underpass at Hlinkova street, since that moment, always. At the time, I was already spending most of my time outside of the housing estate. I came to follow Ťahanovce much more when I started my film studies. Almost all of my practice revolved around the area of about eight streets. A nook in the Belehradská (Belgrade) school served as the main location of the unfinished movie The First Roma President. One by one, I started filming my ŤHC friends. Netflix did not exist at the time, but I reckon if it did, I could offer them a concept of portraits of local inhabitants. The first season could have had 200 episodes, easily. Or 198. Two guys didn't make it.

Peter wanted to be the first Roma president. A crazily talented comedian from Sofijská (Sofia) street. We didn't know the word 'stand-up' even existed seventeen years ago, but Peter could have been among the best five stand-up comedians in the country. Someone like Dave Chappelle. He now lives in England, though. Maybe I could invite him for our 20-year reunion if Netflix signs the contract. In my early adulthood, I rented a flat with my girlfriend in the neighbourhood. Strange local patriotism. The apartment above us was used as a squat. We lost the sense of patriotism after about a year and a half. I had to wait for my girlfriend every evening at the bus stop because someone from the squat above threw a TV on the playground below.

But the times were good. We used to walk our dog at Sahara, the lake was still beautiful with a clear water surface, sometimes disturbed by a plastic chair. Today it is smaller and one cannot see the water through the reeds. The children to dogs ratio in the housing estate was still even. There used to be a meeting spot exclusively for Yorkshire dog owners down at Belehradská (Belgrade) school. I counted sixteen Yorkshires there once. They are now winning on numbers.

Last summer, I decided to try to understand Ťahanovce one more time. I made most of my school movies there, I worked on community development, created several interventions, and was a proud product of this space. I even entered the race for the post of Ťahanovce's mayor.

I can summarise my motivation in several sentences. Last summer, it has been exactly 30 years, since I moved to Ťahanovce with my parents. In 1988, most of the streets were still unfinished. Running around utility corridors, unbuilt apartments and construction houses made me aware of the space that reaches the highest floors of Hanojská (Hanoi) street and the underground network under Budapeštianska (Budapest) street.

My father, Maroš Hudák, was active in the creation of self-governing units and the life of housing co-operative during his whole life in Ťahanovce. Following his work was the most natural thing in the world for me. The attempt failed, but nothing bad happened. At that time I did not even think I would return to Ťahanovce as a regular citizen again.

During the 30-odd years that I've spent in this hood, I've witnessed the forest and the field transform into a construction site and then a housing estate. I've watched different housing communities come and go, but now it's difficult to even see a human being in the streets. I began to understand why I moved out almost ten years ago.

Every car not only prolonged the commute to the city centre but also took a free space that was already scarce between the panel houses. After thirty years of existence, the name of the suburb is misleading. Ťahanovce Parking Lot would be more fitting.

It only took about thirty days in the housing estate for me to start missing natural walks through Komenského Street downtown, or through something that only resembled a city.

List of Contributors

Mišo Hudák is a proud father and a proud citizen of his city. He has been cycling around it since he was 9. He is the founder of the platform *Východné pobrežie* (East coast), and author of books *KSC* and *KSC Kód/Code*, informal city-guides for Košice in the 21st century.

Jana Kočková is an urban sociologist and a researcher from Brno. In her doctoral thesis, she deals with the transformation of large socialist housing estates, especially in Hungary, Czechia and Ukraine. At the same time, she works as a researcher at the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences on a project called *History and Future of Large Housing Estates*, which focuses on the quality of the living environment and residential satisfaction in housing estates. In her professional life, she researches the possibilities of sustainable urban mobility in The Transport Research Center.

Lynda Zein is an architect and urbanist. She teaches urban theory at Archip and is a PhD candidate at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague, focusing on the impact of the built environment on the perception of time. She studied Architecture at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and Urbanism at the *École Spéciale d'Architecture* in Paris, where she graduated in 2015 with the project *Homs, our Cities of Stories*, which presented the concept of a digital participatory platform as one of the spaces for catharsis and an archive of the destroyed city. She developed the topic of the real estate of war through articles in *The Funambulist* magazine and in the *Artalk* revue. She worked in Prague, Barcelona and in *Est-Ce Ainsi* studio in Paris.

Nika Dubrovsky is the author of *A4kids*. She started it for her son Ben, when he was 6 years old in 2008. Her practice evolved from visual arts, journalism and publishing. Her critical position on educational regimes led to the development and publishing of interactive children's books. *Anthropology For Kids* aims at creating an open educational platform with a participatory approach. Reframing crucial aspects of human life – family, money, citizenship, beauty, and alike – *Anthropology For Kids* seeks to deconstruct conditioned notions of how we (should) live, demonstrating the diversity of perspectives and possibilities that exist in different cultures. As an artist Nika showed her works in different museums and galleries around the world. Most recently in *ShowRoom* (London, UK), *KryakK* (Krasnoyarsk, Russia). Nika writes for such publications as *eflux*, *artnet*, publishing house of *Hermitage St. Petersburg* and others. Her books have been published in Russian, Finish, English, Polish and now in Japanese.

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NEVER NEVER SCHOOL 2018
Urban Dialogue with post-socialist city

Find out more about the Never Never School 2018:
<https://nevernever.spolka.cc/never-never-school-2018/>

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