

# JIŽNÍ MĚSTO AS A PLACE TO LIVE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TWO GENERATIONS OF ITS FIRST INHABITANTS

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper introduces the results of a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with respondents in their thirties (who as children at the age of 2-3 moved with their parents into the Prague housing estate Jižní Město in 1977-1978 and spent their childhood and adolescence there) and with their parents. The dataset allows for the identification and analysis of phenomena and processes that are typical of housing estates and life in housing estates during the last thirty years in the context of society changes and maturing of the estates.*

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**JEL Classification:** R11

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Findings from both national and foreign studies, mostly of a quantitative nature (Boška, 2001; Praha 11, 1997; Praha 11, 2002; Musterd & van Kempen, 2005; SÚRM, 2001) indicate that, contrary to the bad image or bad reputation the housing estates might have externally, their residents often display quite a high level of residential satisfaction. It is the reputation of a particular housing estate, or the image of housing estates in general, that is considered to be among the key factors contributing to the acceptance of a housing estate as an adequate place to live; while stigmatization of the housing estates, on the other hand, accelerates their social and subsequent physical decline.

In this paper qualitative research is applied to find out whether the image of the housing estate Jižní Město in Prague (Czech Republic) as perceived by its residents varies significantly from the image presented in the media and adopted by people who neither live in nor know much about housing estates in general, and Jižní Město in particular, apart from the visual impressions the housing estates make, and the feelings and ideas they invoke.

The research discussed in this paper is based on in-depth interviews with today's thirty-somethings and their parents who started to inhabit the then-under-construction Jižní Město in 1978. It explores residential satisfaction with regard to the respondents' changing needs in the course of their lifecycle and in the context of the development and

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maturing of the housing estate. Based on the literature and on the public opinion polls previously carried out in Jižní Město (Musil et al., 1985 Praha 11, 1997; Praha 11, 2002) several areas were identified as the most important for everyday life and satisfaction of inhabitants of housing estates: satisfaction with their own flat and building, availability and quality of basic shops and services, opportunities for leisure activities, quality of public spaces and natural surroundings with enough spots for (active) relaxation, quality of social relations, feelings of safety, etc. The attention is also given the respondents' residential stability, their overall satisfaction with the place of residence and their ideas about the future development of Jižní Město and of housing estates overall. Moreover, special personal determining factors of residential satisfaction are searched for in the respondents' narratives and descriptions of their lifestyle; specifically the way of living of individuals and families as well as the manner of coping with their physical and social environment on a day-to-day basis. Questions of territoriality, identification and identity are also dealt with: whether or not the respondents perceive a specific part of Jižní Město as their personal territory in the sense of self-identification and satisfaction of personal needs.

The paper first briefly introduces basic facts about the past and present of Jižní Město, the Czech largest and best known housing estate. The methodology is discussed next. The main section summarizes empirical results concerning selected research topics such as residential satisfaction; lifestyle; territoriality and identity; patriotism and alienation; current perceptions of the housing estate environment; as well as current assessment of Jižní Město and respondent expectations concerning its future development.

## 2. JIŽNÍ MĚSTO: PAST AND PRESENT

For many Czech people, both experts and the public, "Jižní Město" (in English the "Southern Town"), one of Prague's prefabricated housing estates built in the 1970s and 1980s, has become a symbol of grey, socialist, prefabricated housing projects lacking any human dimension whatsoever. The housing estate has become the scene of a number of Czech films, music videos and advertisements taking place, even vaguely, in the environment of a prefabricated housing estate. The housing estate is referred to in numerous poems and song lyrics. Czech artists, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, described "Jižní Město," and other prefabricated housing estates in general, as "anonymous places lacking any sense of rootedness" (Lukavec, 2009) that make any observer feel depressed.

The construction of Jižní Město (JM) commenced in 1971 on the South-Eastern edge of Prague (see illustrative snapshots from this period in Figure 1). In the course of the construction, the original design changed significantly in order to accommodate more flats at the cost of investments in civic amenities and job opportunities – a typical course of action in housing projects of former Czechoslovakia.

Figure 1: *Looking forward to a new flat in Jižní Město (1977)*

Source: Author's family photo archive

In 1976, the first dwellers moved into flats in the new housing estate, which was still far from completion. In the 1980s, Jižní Město, consisting of two units, Jižní Město I and Jižní Město II, became the largest housing estate in the Czech Republic; the number of its inhabitants<sup>2</sup> was comparable to that of any Czech regional town, but without the appropriate facilities and civic amenities. Particularly, in the first decades of its existence, the housing estate was, in addition to the high level of monofunctionality, marked for demographic anomalies due to the fact that the inhabitants were predominantly young families at the beginning of their family cycle. The capacity of civic amenities and facilities was not adequate to the demographic structure of the inhabitants: e.g. elementary schools had difficulties coping with the high number of children (lessons were held in shifts while the number of children per class neared 40). Since the 1990s, in order to avoid the fate of many Western European housing estates [loss of attractiveness, change in the structure of inhabitants, increased social pathology, depopulation and deterioration faced by many such housing estates in the 1970s and 1980s (Murie, Knorr-Siedow, & van Kempen, 2003; Dekker & van Kempen 2009; van Kempen, Dekker, & Hall, 2005)], the revival and regeneration of Jižní Město became one of the proclaimed priorities of the local politicians, whose aim was to establish suitable conditions for diverse activities of the estate's inhabitants, add the missing functions and, in general, create a well-functioning municipal unit. In addition to the mixed social structure of its inhabitants, the current advantages of this particular housing estate include an attractive natural environment, i.e. municipal forest parks and a water dam, suitable for recreational activities; along with the convenient location on the very edge of Prague, but still within easy reach of the city centre.

Since the 1990s Jižní Město has been part of the municipal district Prague 11<sup>3</sup>. As of 2014, it has 77.047 inhabitants, which represents 6.1 % of the Prague population (First Hand Figures 2014 Prague).

2 Compared to the original number of 4.527 inhabitants as per 1967 (Braun et al., 2000), the number of inhabitants as of March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1991 was 86.425 within a comparable cadastral area (SLBD, 1991).

3 Data on population are available only for Prague 11, not for Jižní Město. However, population of Prague 11 consists mostly of the inhabitants of Jižní Město, because the area of the housing estate covers almost the whole cadastral area of the municipal district Prague 11.

Table 1: *Population Prague 11 by age, education and unemployment rate*

	Prague 11	Prague
Total population*	77,047	1,259,079
Population by age (%)**:		
0-14	11,5	12,1
15-64	72,6	71,6
65+	15,6	15,8
Average age**	42,7	41,2
Population by education (%)**:		
without education	0,2	0,2
primary (including not completed)	9,3	8,9
secondary	50,1	44,2
higher professional and follow-up courses	4,9	4,7
higher education	18,7	20,7
Unemployment rate (%)***	4,9	4,99

Source:

\*) First Hand Figures 2014 Prague.

\*\*\*) Data result from the 2011 Population and Housing Census (CSO, 2013).

\*\*\*) Statistical Bulletin - Prague – 1st Quarter 2015.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Study Topic Selection: Personal Background and Motivation

When I was working on my thesis, which focuses on the current conditions and future prospects of prefabricated housing estates in the Czech Republic (Barvíková, 2011), I happened to co-organise our annual elementary school class reunion; the elementary school I had attended was located in Jižní Město (specifically, Jižní Město I), the place in which I used to live with my parents. When, after many years, I met my former classmates, I realized that we were all approaching a certain age (“the age of Christ”) – and so was Jižní Město. In 1978, when we had all moved to the “castles in the desert” (as one of my respondents later described his first impression of the housing estate with no lawns or pedestrian walkways) with our parents and siblings, we were only three years old. Afterwards, we all joined the same elementary school and we grew up together on asphalt grounds squeezed between the prefabricated blocks of flats as children with “keys strung around their necks.”

The change of the social regime, in 1989 caught us just after entering secondary school. Although I have used the first-person plural, i.e. “we”, throughout this section, each of us took a different path after the last school bell at the elementary school; so much so that I did not have a chance to talk to most of my former schoolmates until the reunion

mentioned above. At that time, they were already living their adult lives. Some of them still live in Jižní Město now, some of them – including me – left Jižní Město when they grew up, and some others have returned after being gone for some time. Most of them are now in the same phase in life as their parents when they first moved to Jižní Město in the 1970s. They have started their own families and have, more or less, settled down. Their parents now fall into the category often referred to as “young pensioners” or are approaching retirement age.

Some of my former classmates, as well as their parents, have made the most out of the opportunities offered by the new era, after 1989, and have started their own businesses or acquired well-paid jobs. They are now members of what we call the higher-middle class of the housing estate’s inhabitants, or have moved to their own family houses in or close to Prague. When I listened to my classmates’ and their relatives’ life stories, memories and opinions on Jižní Město, I realized that a sociologist might be able to trace their stories and subsequently analyze processes typical for Czech housing estates in the last thirty years - relating to both the development and aging of housing estates and the changes in the Czech society. I felt that I might have found a topic for an interesting qualitative study that would be based on a comparative study of the views of two generations, if I could get to interview my former classmates’ parents as well.

### 3.2 Research Objectives

At the beginning of the 1980s, the lives of more than thirty young families living in an anonymous, monofunctional housing estate regularly converged at the local elementary school that was one of the few local civic facilities available at that time. The aim of my research was to identify their current connection to Jižní Město, and their opinions on the housing estate as a place to live for families that, due to the housing situation in the Czech Republic in the middle of the 1970s, had little choice in selecting their homes. How to live life in a place that is a “symbol of all negative aspects of a prefabricated housing estate” (Zadražilová, 2009, p. 49)? What are the current housing estate perceptions of those who grew up in the place and their opinion on the place’s future? These were the main research questions that informed the process of interview questions development.

The interview questions mirrored certain negative stereotypes and ideas of life in a housing estate. In addition, they were linked to the knowledge gathered from the relevant literature including, among other Czech sources, the findings of Musil et al. (1985) and public opinion polls from Praha 11 (1997; 2002). They covered topics such as residential satisfaction concerning the flat, the building, and the environment; social interaction and relationships (neighborhood); integration, identity and territoriality; lifestyle and leisure time; satisfaction of shopping and service needs; criminality and feelings of safety; residential stability and mobility - reasons for moving out and moving back; main advantages of and problems with living in Jižní Město and in housing estates in general; etc. All topics were followed in the respondents’ development of experiences from the past to the present and in relation to the relevant stages of their lifecycle.

### 3.3 Respondent Selection

When selecting the respondents, I tried to get a sample as diversified as possible in terms of respondents' bonds to Jižní Město (residential stability vs. mobility, their relationship with Jižní Město, etc.), lifestyle and social position. I aimed to include pairs: the "child" (former schoolmate) and one of his/her parents; however, each of them was interviewed separately, at a different place and time. I held a total of nine interviews with the representatives of the "children," i.e. the second generation, and seven interviews with the first generation, i.e. the "parents." I selected the grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1999; Hendl, 1999) to process and analyze the acquired data.

### 3.4 Limitations of the Study

The fact that I was familiar with the respondents as well as the Jižní Město neighbourhood was an advantage in certain respects, and a disadvantage or a risk in others. It certainly made the recruitment of two generations of respondents easier, and contributed to the respondents' helpfulness and openness in interviews. My knowledge of the neighbourhood also contributed to my greater theoretical sensitiveness in my researcher role and enabled me to comprehend the context of the respondents' narratives. Of course, the researcher's insider knowledge of the studied reality has a downside to it as well, in that it contains a certain risk of explaining parts of the narrative using one's own pre-understanding and pre-knowledge. I tried to avoid this risk already at the time of conducting the interviews and, later on, especially by analysing the individual narratives thoroughly and patiently.

As for other possible limitations of this study, it is necessary to note that all first-generation respondents already had an experience with living in urban flat houses at the time of their arrival to Jižní Město, most often in overcrowded flats in the period of a general housing shortage. In contrast, the second-generation respondents adapted to the local environment since their early childhood, did not have any memories of the previous place of residence, and thus no basis for comparison. Experiences and attitudes of those who came to Jižní Město from the countryside, from higher quality housing, or of lone-living individuals can be different. I nevertheless hope that even though it is not possible to generalize from the results of my qualitative study, they can be perceived as typical in terms of experiences made by the first inhabitants of many Czech and Eastern European housing estates of this type – especially housing estates with a mixed social structure and a good location in large cities with high housing price levels.

## 4. OVERVIEW OF EMPIRICAL RESULTS

### 4.1 Residential Satisfaction and Lifestyle from the Lifecycle Perspective

Both the literature (Musil et al., 1985; Murie et al., 2003, among others) and the narratives of the respondents participating in my research show that for young families which suffered the housing shortage of the 1970s in Czechoslovakia, living in housing estates was not a reason for desperate depressions and a pointless yearning for salvation, as popular portraits of the miserable TV hero might make us think [see, for example, the character of Otík from the iconic Czech comedy *Vesničko má středisková* (1985) who had to be rescued from the clutches of the housing estate (Havlín, 2009)]. Instead, most often it was their dream come true to have a flat of their own, considering the housing conditions they had come from - typically tight multigenerational households - and the years they had waited for the allocation of a new flat. Even those who moved to Jižní Město involuntarily, from redeveloped Prague quarters, very quickly accepted their new flats for their own. For them, too, moving meant a marked step upwards in their housing careers - central heating, hot water, bathroom and a private toilet was something that rarely anyone had in their flats in the old (inner-)city quarters (Říha, 2007). Results of the research projects conducted by Musil et al. (1985) in the 1970s and 80s also speak of higher housing satisfaction levels among the inhabitants of the new housing estates as compared to those living in the old city quarters.

In the recollections of my classmates - then three-year-olds - the period of the first years, after moving to Jižní Město, most often resonates with memories of a very pleasant family atmosphere, which reflected the happiness of their parents with their new housing situation and the newly gained privacy. The eyes of many of my classmates shine with amazement, even after all those years, when they speak of the excitement they felt as small children - watching the work of construction machines and the activity at the construction site; playing with the muddy clay; sliding down the heaps of dirt on clattering bicycles; and squelching in the puddles with their wellingtons. Comparatively, the joy from the new dwelling and from one's own adaptability to the conditions (such as carrying a damp cloth in the handbag, etc.) both helped the parents' generation overcome the practical complications that living in the new housing complexes brought with it. Despite all the reservations they might hold against their flats and the housing estates as such, they have maintained a certain feeling of gratitude until today. This feeling is rooted in the conviction that they would hardly be able to obtain better housing through different means, in the conditions of the political regime that prevailed at that time. The housing estates provided a solution to the housing distress of an enormous number of people, which is something that both respondent generations see as their main benefit (similarly as found in e.g. Musil et al. [1985]; Murie et al. [2003]; van Kempen et al., [2005]). They accepted the initial difficulties associated with the malfunctioning of the housing estate complexes in the first months after moving in, with an understanding that in the case of such a massive construction there was no other option to go about it.

My qualitative research indicates that the personal perception and evaluation of the environment of a housing estate depends on the respondent's age or lifecycle phase, as related to changes in personal radius of action, personal ties to the place of residence, and demands concerning one's flat and its environment. An important finding is that the relationship to one's place of residence is, apart from the place's physical qualities, affected by the level of personal satisfaction and fulfillment of one's needs connected with a particular life phase: in childhood, success or failure at school as well as the quality of peer relationships and family environment may play an important part; while in adulthood, the "empty nest syndrome" after grown-up children leave home, or partner crisis may be of importance<sup>4</sup>.

For the second-generation respondents, Jižní Město (for the most part) was a scene of a happy childhood (*cf.* Salák, 2007). The way of life in Jižní Město changed as the children grew. As children, these respondents did not feel the negative aspects or limitations of the environment (the design, lack of teenage leisure time activities, etc.) until the end of their playtime period and the end of elementary school attendance. (Similarly to these respondents, their parents considered Jižní Město more satisfying for pre-school and school children; compare also to Čajánková & Musil [1984]; Musil et al., [1985])<sup>5</sup>. The transition to secondary school was a radical change. Jižní Město was no longer a place of concentration that could satisfy all their needs. As a result of daily commuting to schools located in different parts of Prague, friendships established at the place of residence got interrupted; for many, this was a challenge. Social life and satisfaction of personal needs, other than those directly linked to a flat, were taking place elsewhere. In adolescence and maturity (except for childcare periods), this tendency continued, and was no longer perceived as negative for its impact on the quality of life.

The lifestyle of the first generation, i.e. the parents, has particularly depended on the phase of family life and the burden connected with work (working time, shifts) and commuting to work (time). The respondents' answers imply that the idea of a "night shelter," - the impression that rather than actually "living" in their flats, the housing estate residents only spend the nights there - may result from the general modern lifestyle characterized by the fact that economically active persons spend most of the day outside their homes, irrespective of where they live, and have no time or energy left to enjoy cultural or sports opportunities under the burden of everyday routines. Consequently, the concept of "night shelters" is a product of the current lifestyle rather than a feature of prefabricated housing estates. While there is certain criticism, particularly concerning the lack of civic amenities (especially after moving in), this generation does not feel that, on its own, life in Jižní Město has a negative impact on the manner in which they spend their free time. Many respondents believe that, thanks to the surrounding nature, the opposite is true. Apart from

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4 See Lux (2002) concerning the limitations of residential satisfaction research and inability to cover all determining factors.

5 These research findings also show that parents appreciated their new housing complexes particularly due to the opportunity to have small children move freely and play outside. Compared to other types of residential locations in towns, children from prefab housing estates spent most of their free time outdoors, but there were insufficient outdoor activities available for children aged 10+.



the above, the specific content of leisure time activities of a particular family depends on individual preferences; needs and opportunities given by the financial position; availability of a family recreational facility;<sup>6</sup> level of mobility (car ownership), etc.<sup>7</sup> The respondents' leisure time preferences correspond to general trends typical for city dwellers, i.e. to leave the city for extended periods of time off in order to run away from the city environment and spend time in nature or at a cottage or allotment garden (Musil et al., 1985). Thanks to its location on the very edge of the city, close to the nature, and thanks to the character of the nearby countryside, Jižní Město offers the highest recreational potential - people can spend time in nature even on weekdays, engaging in sports (cycling, bathing, ski running, sledding, skating); this is considered one of the main values of the local environment. Although not a "town" in the typical sense of the word, Jižní Město may be a comfortable residential quarter that, despite its design, offers a certain quality of life that may include the rare opportunity to put on your running skis right in front of your building and set off for the forest.

Surprisingly, most respondents' departures<sup>8</sup> from Jižní Město were not driven by their dissatisfaction with the environment of the housing estate or the flat. This was the motif of only one couple of the parents' generation and, in addition, was the result of a long-term illness and personal crisis. Other departures related to events in the normal course of life – the separation of an adult child from its parents, divorce, etc. Although the results of this qualitative research cannot be considered adequate and fully representative, and cannot be relied upon to draw general conclusions, I am of the opinion that we must be careful in interpreting statistical data (e.g. those derived from population censuses), not to routinely attribute changes in housing estate inhabitants to loss of attractiveness and social degradation of these neighbourhoods.

## 4.2 Territoriality and Identity

Another surprising finding that is key to understanding the context of the respondents' answers is the fact that, within Jižní Město, the area which the respondents perceive as their territory, identify with and evaluate in their answers, is not the entire Jižní Město as delimited by the cadastral territory boundaries. For the most part, their "Jižňák" (which is the common name for Jižní Město, widely and spontaneously used in the interviews) does not cover Jižní Město II, often not even the entire Jižní Město I (being the place of their residence). For each resident, the personal perception of boundaries of the territory – their personal Jižní Město ("Jižňák"), irrespective of the official cadastral territory – varies. The respondents identify places around which they are (were) used to move, places

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6 The ownership of a family recreational facility in the countryside (known as the "second home") and its regular use in periods of time off work is a common feature in the Czech Republic.

7 Musil et al., (1985) and Janto (2007) are also sceptical about the application of deterministic cultural theories to the environment of a housing estate.

8 Of all the families that were connected with my class at the end of our compulsory school attendance and lived in Jižní Město at that time, about three quarters are living in Jižní Město now (at least some of the family members).

that constitute (constituted) “their world,” and places that provide (provided) resources to satisfy their needs. Behind the borders of this assumed “Jižňák” starts the territory which, even though within the same housing estate, appears “strange” to the respondents; there, they do not orientate themselves<sup>9</sup>, do not know their way around and do not like it there, although to a regular observer the visual impression (“inside” and “outside” “Jižňák”) might seem nearly identical. (For two of female respondents of the second generation, when searching for a flat in Jižní Město at adult age, the location of the flat in their “Jižňák” was one of the main requirements.)

Nearly all the respondents had their favourite places in their Jižňák; places in which they used to play as children or places to which they go (used to go) for a walk, particularly the forest park. They could however not identify a place in the housing estate for which they would have really strong personal feelings, apart from their own flat. In this respect, and also in connection with the different perception of housing estates by “outsiders” (visitors) and “insiders” (local residents), Relph’s concept of identity of and with place appears quite inspiring. While for an outsider, the identity of the place is difficult to discover in the seemingly uniform housing estate environment, an insider may find his/her identity with the place due to strong social experiences (Seamon & Sowers, 2008).

Despite certain original, ambitious, theoretical concepts of housing estate development projects, whose aim was to create in these housing estates the residential environment that would satisfy all recreational needs of local inhabitants without a need to saturate them elsewhere through the ownership of “second homes”, the respondents’ answers show that “second homes” very well complement their real homes in housing estates and the life in a city in general; and may even contribute to higher residential satisfaction, loyalty and residential stability. The availability of a “second home” allows people to combine the advantages of city life with the advantages of living in a countryside, and use both to the fullest. On the other hand, people who regularly spend their free time, or any extended periods of time over the year in their “second homes,” tend to spend less time at their first place of residence. As a result, the identification with one’s own neighbourhood may be weakened, and the personal perception of the place as nothing but a “night shelter” may be strengthened. A major group of these “cottagers” are people whose cottages are located at places of their childhood, so the trips to their cottage bring them back to their roots; as a result, the social life in their “second homes” may become much more intensive and personally important than life in their “first homes.”

#### 4.3 Patriotism vs. Alienation

Those respondents who no longer live in Jižní Město - whose lives have been taking place elsewhere for many years - gradually start feeling like strangers in the environment they once considered their home; not only have the places of their childhood, teenage

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<sup>9</sup> “If one is to feel at home in a place, one needs an opportunity to identify with the place and orient oneself in it”, (Norberg-Schulz [1994: 18]; cited by Zdražilová [2003]).

years and life in general changed or disappeared, but they can no longer orientate themselves in the transformed environment, and lose their ability to “read” it. They feel insecure about it, and take critical distance from the unknown environment, similarly to accidental visitors who have no personal experience of living in this environment, and only form their opinion on the basis of their own perception of the place’s physical features. Local old timers, on the other hand, as patriots, have a tendency to defend the housing estate; nevertheless, as already mentioned above, if they go beyond the boundaries of their “own” “Jižňák,” they themselves become unsatisfied strangers in the middle of Jižní Město.

#### 4.4 Current Perceptions of the Housing Estate Environment

From the perspective of its design and layout, Jižní Město is definitely not accepted by the respondents without criticism. The main objections include the contradiction between the project’s original construction plan and the actual implementation. Jižní Město was supposed to be a self-sustaining unit; yet, it has never become one (in the words of one of the respondents, it is a “town” only by its name). While at least the offer of basic shops and services has gradually grown, many plans have not been implemented up to this day. Regarding the architectural appearance and urban design of prefabricated housing estates, which was revolutionary in its time (Musil et al., 1985, Murie et al., 2003), those who have lived in the housing estate for an extended period of time have more or less adopted the concept, and accepted the advantages. Contrary to the opinion of certain architects, these people do not miss the traditional system of streets; what is important for them is that the necessary shops and services be within a reasonable walking distance. While large free spaces between buildings are perceived as a positive feature by the respondents – helping them avoid feeling restricted and constrained by the height of the buildings and the population density, the plans to use the space for new constructions, as proposed by some experts and the local council, appear scary to local residents, and they put up their resistance. The reason for the resistance is that even the current density of population and the number of high-rise buildings in Jižní Město are higher than comfortable for the respondents (the respondents repeatedly mentioned that the part of the estate housing consisting of four-floor buildings seemed like an “ideal” place); they are of the opinion that the current configuration of the housing estate already tests the limits of physical tolerance and the prospect of an even larger concentration of buildings (especially high-rise buildings) with an increased number of inhabitants and increased traffic would definitely exceed those limits. The respondents acknowledge the need to build new flats but, in their opinion, these should be erected outside the area of the current blocks of flats (whose capacity is considered fully used), at a suitable location, and only to a reasonable extent. Apart from the fear of overpopulation, the idea of massive flat development increases anxiety about restricted access to local sources that are already limited (parking spaces, nursery school capacity, GP’s offices, etc.).

The respondents consider the local greenery the highest aesthetic value of the housing estate environment. Any development projects should not take place at the cost of lawns

and plants; the construction should be “for people,” i.e. such that will make the life of the local population more comfortable (bring elements of civic amenities that these people miss, e.g. a natural cultural and administrative centre, such as a “square” with shops and cafés, along with job opportunities) and that will be in harmony with the surrounding buildings. The current development projects presented in the media are perceived with hesitation: “Who is going to benefit? This is not for us!” Local residents particularly disagree with the idea that the built-up area should expand up to the forest park borderline; in addition to the disappearance of meadows that are much safer than forest parks - at times when there are fewer people outside - this would mean that people would have to spend more time, and overcome a longer distance, to travel away “from the overcrowded housing estate into the nature.”

The quality of the view from the window is one of the key factors of the respondents’ satisfaction and identification with the flat and the flat’s location; a view of greenery, countryside or old Prague (Petřín, the Prague Castle) is a key value that may help overcome certain defects of the flat and the environment. If people have an opportunity to see treetops from their windows and watch them changing over the year; or to see the countryside, even if through a gap between the surrounding buildings; or to see the horizon and ignore close surroundings, prefabricated blocks of flats tend to become a practical solution to the housing situation, irrespective of their aesthetic and visual value. The buildings located on the outskirts of the housing estate are most popular among the respondents as the view from their windows, particularly on higher floors, is of the best quality; on the other hand, the lower the floor and the higher the density of the buildings, the higher the chance of an unattractive view of “the windows of the opposite building.”<sup>10</sup> The new high-rise development projects that are to take away the current much-loved views are perceived as a major loss of value.

#### 4.5 Current Assessment of Jižní Město and Ideas about Its Future

Although the impulse for the second-generation respondents to move out of Jižní Město did not come from their dissatisfaction with the flat or the environment of the housing estate, there are differences in the assessment of the housing estate’s current status and future prospects between the patriots - those who have lived here or who again live here or who spend considerable time here - and those who have already become estranged from Jižní Město and now, similarly to outsiders, maintain a critical distance and feel a lack of security in the unknown environment. While the former do not worry about the future of Jižní Město, considering it an ideal place for a comfortable city life for those who can appreciate a quiet comfortable life close to nature and within easy reach of the city centre, the latter can observe certain signs of social degradation and admit uncertainty or

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<sup>10</sup> This preference of higher floors seems to be in direct contradiction with the experience from e.g. the USA; Bauer (1954) states that in high-rise developments, local families prefer lower floors (as cited in Dekker & van Kempen, 2009). Nevertheless, the source of motivation for this preference among my respondents were the windows with countryside view; in more central parts of the housing estate this preference might not apply, as the window view, even from higher floors, does not offer this advantage.

even worries about the future development of Jižní Město, which they consider a sort of a starting place for young families. In many respects, the first-generation respondents' view of the present and future of Jižní Město is similar; although they consider the composition of population one of the major factors determining the development of Jižní Město, they rarely harbor worries about its social development with respect to the housing market prices in Prague, and the large share of population living in housing estates. What makes them feel major uncertainty, however, is the limited life span along with technical conditions of the prefabricated blocks of flats (they very well remember the original designated life span of a prefabricated building and harbor even more doubts concerning the quality of initially performed work). From this perspective, the future of housing estates depends on the availability of funding that can be invested into first class maintenance and repairs. As most buildings in the studied quarter have already been regenerated, worries relate to a more distant future, when all buildings are presumed to need repair and renovation at the same time.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND CHALLENGES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Prefabricated housing estates in the Czech Republic represent an issue on which most of the general as well as professional public (across the relevant fields) has a clear (negative) opinion about; the opinion which is frequently quite firm, even though individuals may have no - or only minimal - personal or professional experience with the environment. The results of qualitative research presented and discussed in this paper, however, indicate that the real image of a housing estate, specifically the image perceived by the “insiders”, may vary significantly from the external image as depicted in the media and adopted by the “outsiders” who do not live in housing estates and do not actually know that much about them, except how the housing estates came across physically and what feelings and notions they evoke in them. The outcomes of my study are consistent with quantitative studies (Boška, 2001; Praha 11, 1997; Praha 11, 2002; SÚRM, 2001) in displaying quite a high level of residential satisfaction among the inhabitants of Jižní Město despite its bad external image and reputation.

Concerning the future prospects of Jižní Město, particular differences are perceived between those respondents who still live there and those who have moved out (and do not have any particular feelings about Jižní Město today). While “local people” are rarely concerned about the future of Jižní Město and hardly admit its potential social degradation, the approach of the current “outsiders” is more under the influence of the information on the risks involved in housing estate changes and development as presented in the media.

Despite the fact that living in housing estates concerns almost one third of the Czech population, the topic had been rather neglected by the research community since the middle 1980s until very recently. Many false myths on the functioning of housing estates are still widespread and there are a lot of blank spots that should yet be made the subject of research and analysis. This is one of the main starting points of the up to date most

extensive multidisciplinary Czech research project called “Paneláci”<sup>11</sup> focused on housing estates, which is currently underway. The purpose of the five year project (2013-2017) is to research and document the prefabricated housing estates in the Czech Republic; to capture their historical, cultural and social aspects; to critically evaluate their housing and living potential; and to refute the unfounded myths. This project, led by The Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague and involving experts from various research institutions, also includes work with the media and the general public using exhibitions in all regions of the Czech Republic, lectures, educational programs, internet communication via the project’s webpage and Facebook, etc. Because of the active communication with the general and professional public a promising byproduct of the project is the coming together and networking of professionals, researchers, students, as well as laymen who are highly interested in the topic of housing estates, and of their activities<sup>12</sup>. The future will show if these emerging synergies bring any real impact on the image and development of housing estates.

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11 “Paneláci” is a plural of the colloquial term “panelák” in Czech and Slovak, literally meaning “panel house”. The official title of the project funded by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic is “Prefabricated Housing Estates in the Czech Republic as Part of the Urban Environment: An Evaluation and Presentation of Their Housing and Living Potential”. For more information see <http://www.panelaci.cz/> or <https://www.facebook.com/panelaci>.

12 For example the current research project, “Housing Estates in V4, What’s Next?” at the Faculty of Architecture CTU in Prague (2014-15), which aims to define the basic possibilities and recommendations on how to proceed with the complex regeneration of housing estates and ensure their long-term stability. For details see <http://www.sidlistejakdal.cz>.

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