SEEING SAPA: READING A TRANSNATIONAL MARKETPLACE IN THE POST-SOCIALIST CITYSCAPE

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Abstract: *Central and Eastern European post-socialist states have undergone profound political and economic changes in the three decades since 1989. Although the dramatic transformations of the immediate post-socialist period were highly visible and widely documented, recent political and economic developments are crucial to understanding the region's contemporary conjuncture. The broad trend of moving away from liberalism and toward an emergent authoritarian politics, both in the Visegrád states and elsewhere, raises new uncertainties regarding the rule of law, the civil rights of minority groups, and the status of democratic rule. Meanwhile, the region's increasingly globalised economies have variously embraced and shunned Western economic influence, maintaining and cultivating trade and political linkages with the former "Soviet ecumene" and in Southeast and East Asia, notably China and Vietnam.*

Amid these trends, novel forms of urban space locate and reveal a variety of perspectives on the nature of the post-socialist transition. Since its founding in 1999, Sapa marketplace, on the outskirts of Prague, has become a focus of transnational trade networks and a cultural centre of the Vietnamese-Czech community in Czechia. Czech scholars have emphasised Sapa as an important centre of Vietnamese-Czech culture in the Czech Republic; I consider more expansively how Sapa can be conceptualised as a transnational and post-socialist urban space, and how legacies of migration and informal economic activity have contributed to its formation. I explore the material present of Sapa, which helps to locate, focus, and reveal specific legacies of the socialist past and the dynamics of the post-socialist transition.

Keywords: *Sapa marketplace, urban space, transnationalism, post-socialist cities, Vietnamese-Czech diaspora*

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Introduction

Each day at Sapa, more than 350 business entities with thousands of employees engage in trade with tens of thousands of visitors (see Figure 1)[1]. The act of trade is at once highly localised and highly transnational.[2] At Sapa, one is just as likely to come across a Chinese-made smartphone as a bundle of Thai basil grown in Czechia. There are wholesalers hailing from dozens of countries, some of whom who deal only in multiples of one thousand; there are pensioners from neighbouring apartment buildings who come for a single bag of groceries. Buddhists offer incense at one of Prague's few public temples (see Figure 2). Children play in and out of their parents' storefronts while mothers tend cash registers, or scale fish, or talk.

In a window, advertisements for round-trip airfares are posted. Prague to Hanoi, via Moscow: CZK 16,500. There are non-stop tickets to Moscow, Istanbul and Chengdu; connections to Ulaanbaatar, Beirut, and Beijing (see Figure 3). Three adjacent travel agencies attract passers-by with signs in Chinese, Czech, English, and Vietnamese. Another multilingual sign reads "Korea Mart and Asian Foods Supermarket"; nearby, a store claims to be Czechia's largest importer of goods from India, Indonesia, and China. Around another corner a sign reads "Turkish Goods" (*Turecké zboží*) alongside the star and crescent (see Figures 4, and 5).

[1] This publication was supported by the Morehead-Cain Foundation.

[2] Numerous definitions of transnationalism have been proposed. Here, I use the term in reference to Steven Vertovec's conceptualisation, characterised by "sustained cross-border relationships, patterns of exchange, affiliations and social formations spanning nation-states" (Vertovec 2009, 2).

Figure 1: A streetscape just north of Sapa's main entry gate. Photo: Ezra Rawitsch, 2018.

Figure 2: The flag of Vietnam flies over Sapa's Buddhist shrine, one of only a few in Prague. Photo: Ezra Rawitsch, 2018.

Figure 3: A multilingual advertisement in Czech and Vietnamese for flights from Prague to Hanoi on Aeroflot, the Russian national air carrier. Photo: Ezra Rawitsch, 2018.

How has such a space – a vibrant, transnational, multilingual space – come to be where it is, on the outskirts of Prague, in an unassuming set of low-rise warehouses? My subject in this paper is Sapa, a remarkable marketplace and cultural centre. But it is also an attempt to unfold and trace elements of the established narrative of Sapa and examine how it might be extended to situate the marketplace in a broader context. I aim to show how Sapa can serve as a case study of the imbricated patterns of post-socialist landscape transformation, transnational migration, and alternative economies, while also proposing a fragmentary, multiple approach that seeks to destabilise existing conventions and reveal additional ways of interpreting the urban landscape.

Figure 4: The various signs on display at Sapa. Photo: Ezra Rawitsch, 2018.

Figure 5: The Sapa site, centre, as it appears in a 2018 aerial photograph. Photo: IPR Praha GeoPortal, 2019.[3]

Research Design and Approaches

This project has emerged from a lifetime of exposure to the expatriate communities of Central and Eastern Europe in Los Angeles, California and a longstanding desire to engage first-hand the landscape remembered to me at countless gatherings of family and friends. My interest in post-socialist cities began as an intern for a housing NGO in Bratislava, Slovakia, where during the summer of 2016 I worked on a research project concerning the nature of public spaces in the post-socialist period.

I carried out fieldwork in Prague during the summer of 2018. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature and methodologies, including my site visits to Sapa in 2018, archival research, aerial photography, unstructured interviews, and

[3] Photos from the IPR Praha GeoPortal are used under the Creative Commons licensing terms (CC BY-SA 4.0).

visual analysis, I develop a reading of the landscape as a palimpsestic text characterised by the relationship between its multiple overlapping layers of detail. From city archives to geotagged posts on social media to aerial photographs of the Sapa marketplace site, the resulting work is a synthesis of these interrelated repositories and my personal notes, photographs, recordings, and memories.

Three main theoretical approaches have guided my inquiry. Reading Sapa's structure and form, I propose several additional ways of seeing Sapa as an urban space which is:

1. Reflective of the urban political economies of post-socialism, especially the Lefebvrian production of spaces that conform to post-socialist political, social, and economic frameworks.
2. Exemplary of the fractured, multiple, and overlapping geographies of socialism and post-socialism, which defy unidimensional understanding (here I reference Doreen Massey's concepts of progressive sense of place); and,
3. Expressive of diverse economic practices that complicate the idea that post-socialism is essentially capitalistic in nature (here I work with J. K. Gibson-Graham's conceptions of diverse economies).

I worked with a research group at Charles University to establish connections at Prague's main archive (Archiv hlavního města Prahy), in Chodovec, and with the Prague Institute of Planning and Development (Institut plánování a rozvoje hlavního města Prahy). With the help of my contacts at these organisations, I was able to arrange viewings of historical urban plans and access repositories of aerial photography which illustrated how the site that is now home to Sapa was imagined and transformed over time.

The Prague Institute of Planning and Development and the city of Prague maintain excellent online repositories of GIS data and imagery that were invaluable to my project (IPR Praha n.d.). These repositories insured my ability to take my research from Prague back to North Carolina and continue my work throughout the fall of 2018 and the spring of 2019. This combination of methodological approaches aims to interface with and extend existing literature, offering several cultural and historical geographic approaches to understanding the cityscape of post-socialist Prague.

The Marketplace

Sapa is located in Praha-Libuš, an outlying neighbourhood ten kilometres south of Prague's historical centre which was mostly farmland until the 1970s. The site which now houses Sapa was constructed between 1970 and 1975 as an integrated complex of industrial, residential, and recreational buildings (a microdistrict or *mikrorayon*):[4] a meat processing factory, a *panelaky* residential tower-block, a school, and a recreation centre housing a pool.

In the immediate post-socialist period (1989–1999), informal and open-air markets emerged on vacant sites around Prague, including the present-day Sapa site (Drbohlav and Čermáková 2016). In 1999, the facility was sold to a consortium of Vietnamese-Czech investors doing business as Saparia, a.s., which established market stalls within existing warehouses and factory buildings, and made them available for rent to independent wholesalers and merchants (Fiedlerová and Sýkora 2015; Freidingerová and Svobodová 2015).

Over time, the market has grown to accommodate an extensive variety of functions and groups. One can find at Sapa "restaurants, grocery shops, hairdressers, nail studios, travel agencies, medical doctors, a nursery, a translation bureau, a wedding studio and a Buddhist pagoda", among many other kinds of businesses and non-governmental organisations (Freidingerová and Svobodová 2015).[5]

In quantifiable terms, Sapa can be described as 27 hectares of wholesale-retail-commercial-cultural-culinary-religious space. It is among the largest marketplaces in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Qualitatively, it is known in the popular imagination of Praguers and many visitors to Czechia's capital as "the Vietnamese market", but it has been described in various ways. It is characterised in academic writing as a "marketplace" (Drbohlav and Čermáková 2016), a "bazaar" (Hüwelmeier 2013; Fiedlerová and Sýkora 2015), described

[4] The term, from the Russian микрорайо́н, characterises the large-scale planned suburban residential developments common to much of Central and Eastern Europe during the socialist period.

[5] Very little quantitative data has been produced concerning Sapa's operations. Privately-held Saparia, a.s., which acts as the administrator of the Sapa site, releases a limited picture of their financials. Additionally, much of Sapa's economic activity is informal or not published. Saparia's latest official filing with the Czech government showed CZK 5,800,000 (about 212,000 euros) cash on hand and fewer than five full-time employees (Kurzy.cz n.d.). The largest listed company located at Sapa, Tamda Foods, s.r.o., showed CZK 398,000,000 (about 14.5 million euros) cash on hand in 2019 (Kurzy.cz n.d.). I have not delved into the economic details of the market's hundreds of enterprises in this paper; however, future research might consider the scope and reach of firms doing business at Sapa.

in popular media as "Little Hanoi" (Děd and de Babraque 2010), and called by one writer "a Vietnamese paradise" (Storm 2015).

Sapa is a focal point of Vietnamese[6] culture, commerce, and social life not only in Prague, but in Czechia more broadly. It has been argued that Prague has become a centre for the Vietnamese-Czech "mostly because of ... the trade and cultural centre of Sapa" (Freidingerová and Svobodová 2015). However, Sapa is also characterised by a profound diversity of economic, cultural, and social practices, which, when considered, help to construct a more complete portrait of the marketplace and its urban surroundings. Informed by the influence of the Vietnamese-Czech community on Sapa, I wish to situate Sapa in a broader context: within a landscape of post-socialist urban development, characteristic of the cross-border relationships and exchanges which have come to typify the region in the 21st century, and amid the proliferation of informal economic practices in the aftermath of post-socialist transition.

The Production of Space in the Post-Socialist City

Spatial transformations at Sapa in the last two decades illustrate how spaces constructed in the socialist conjuncture were reformed, reimagined, and reconstructed to fit the needs of a market economy. These changes have tended to be gradual, informal, and occasionally fraught with allegations of wrongdoing. This process of change helps to situate Sapa in its broader geopolitical and urban spatial context: not as a thing apart from the city; rather, as a constitutive element of the post-socialist urban landscape.

Legacies of socialism on the urban periphery: 1945–1989

The history of the Sapa site, illustrated in archival aerial imagery, reveals how the physical structures of Socialism endure in the urban form of the marketplace and its surroundings. At the same time, the gradual adaptation of these structures shows the path-dependent manner of spatial transition.

At the end of World War II, the Sapa site was made up of individually parcelled farmland between the nearby villages of Libuš and Pisnice, both of which underwent little expansion during the following decade (see Figures 8,

[6] A note on terminology: I use the terms "Vietnamese" and "Vietnamese-Czech" in slightly different ways in this paper; in general, I employ the former when making more general reference to the national and linguistic community irrespective of diasporic location, while the latter is used in specific relation to the community of Vietnamese people in the Czech Republic, irrespective of citizenship.

Figure 6: A 1971 city map of Prague does not depict the future Sapa site. Photo: Prague City Archives (Archiv hlavního města Prahy), 1971.

and 9). There is a twenty-two-year gap in available aerial imagery; however, a 1971 city plan does not depict the site (see Figure 6). Furthermore, the 1971 plan shows that the administrative boundary of the city of Prague did not yet encompass the site that today houses Sapa (see Figures 6, and 7).

Aerial photographs taken in 1975 illustrate the construction site of the Masokombinat Libuš, or Masokombinát for short, as part of an integrated mikrorayon-style development featuring high-rise residential towers, recreational facilities, and factory buildings. City plans produced in 1979 show the finished

Figure 7: The Masokombinat site is depicted on a 1979 plan of the city of Prague Photo: Prague City Archives (Archiv hlavního města Prahy), 1979

Masokombinát and the expanded administrative region of the municipality of Prague, which grew to encompass nearby Pisnice in 1974 (see Figure 7).

In 1989, on the eve of the transition, aerial photographs show an expanded complex of factory and residential buildings now fully intertwined with the traditional edges of Libuš, officially a district of Prague, and adjacent to other industrial-style developments. Still, the Masokombinát remains on the very edge of the city of Prague, bounded to the south by swaths of farmland and the small village of Pisnice (see Figure 11).

Figure 8: A 1945 aerial photo of the present-day site of Sapa Marketplace, near the village of Libuš (upper left) south of Prague's historical center Photo: IPR Praha GeoPortal, 2019.

Figure 9: A 1953 area photograph looks much the same as the 1945 photograph; however, the collectivization of agricultural land is evident in the erasure of boundaries between plots. Photo: IPR Praha GeoPortal, 2019.

Figure 10: The construction site of the Masokombinat Libuš as it appeared in a 1975 aerial photograph. The main building of the southern area of the complex, which today houses merchants and wholesalers, appears nearly finished. Photo: IPR Praha GeoPortal, 2019.

Figure 11: The finished Masokombinat pictured in a 1988 or 1989 aerial photograph. The northern area of the site, constructed after the southern area, is now visible. Photo: IPR Praha GeoPortal, 2019.

From transition to the present: 1989–2018

Exactly what occurred with the Sapa site in the ten years following the Velvet Revolution is up for some debate, but a fractured portrait suggests a bungled privatisation process with implications of fraud that resulted in the bankruptcy of the Masokombinát facility. It is known that between 1995 and 1996, František Chvalovský, a Czech footballer and entrepreneur, took a majority stake in the privatized successor to Masokombinát, which adopted the trade name "Satrapa" and sought to establish a group of meat producers at the former Masokombinát. Plans collapsed in January 2000 with a filing for bankruptcy that alleged the group carried debts "in the billions" of Czech crowns (Cizner 2000). Allegations of *tunelování,* or "tunneling"[7], in which the remaining cash and solvent assets of one firm are fraudulently transferred to another through the "tunnel" of a dubious bankruptcy scheme, surround Satrapa's ruin. The uncertain circumstances of Satrapa's insolvency were not ameliorated by the subsequent arrest at Prague airport of majority shareholder Chvalovský on 27 February, 2001 and his indictment for a fraud alleged at CZK 640,000,000 (Carey 2000; Flint 2017).

Saparia a.s., which represented the consortium of investors that would come to own the Masokombinát site, incorporated on 5 October, 1999. By early 2001, "cheap electronics and clothing" were already on sale at the Sapa site (Cizner 2000). By 2003, shipping containers, themselves a manifestation of the globalisation and containerisation of the economies of former post-socialist states (see Rodrigue and Notteboom 2009; Vertovec 2009), lined the fences that form the boundary of the Sapa site.

A series of aerial photographs dating from 1988 through 2018 reveal how Saparia and its tenants appropriated, adapted, and reformed socialist-era spaces to meet the needs of their enterprises. These photographs offer a novel way of tracking the unfolding of the post-socialist transition on the urban landscape. Between 1996 and 2010, approximately ten to fifteen new buildings of various sizes, from small sheds to large warehouses, were constructed on the Sapa site (see Figure 12). Between 2000 and 2003, the largest temporary market hall was demolished in order to construct a more permanent covered market hall in an adjacent area. Today, these large market halls house many of the marketplace's soft goods merchants. While new construction was common,

[7] The term "tunneling" in English actually comes from Czech to describe exactly the practice alleged here.

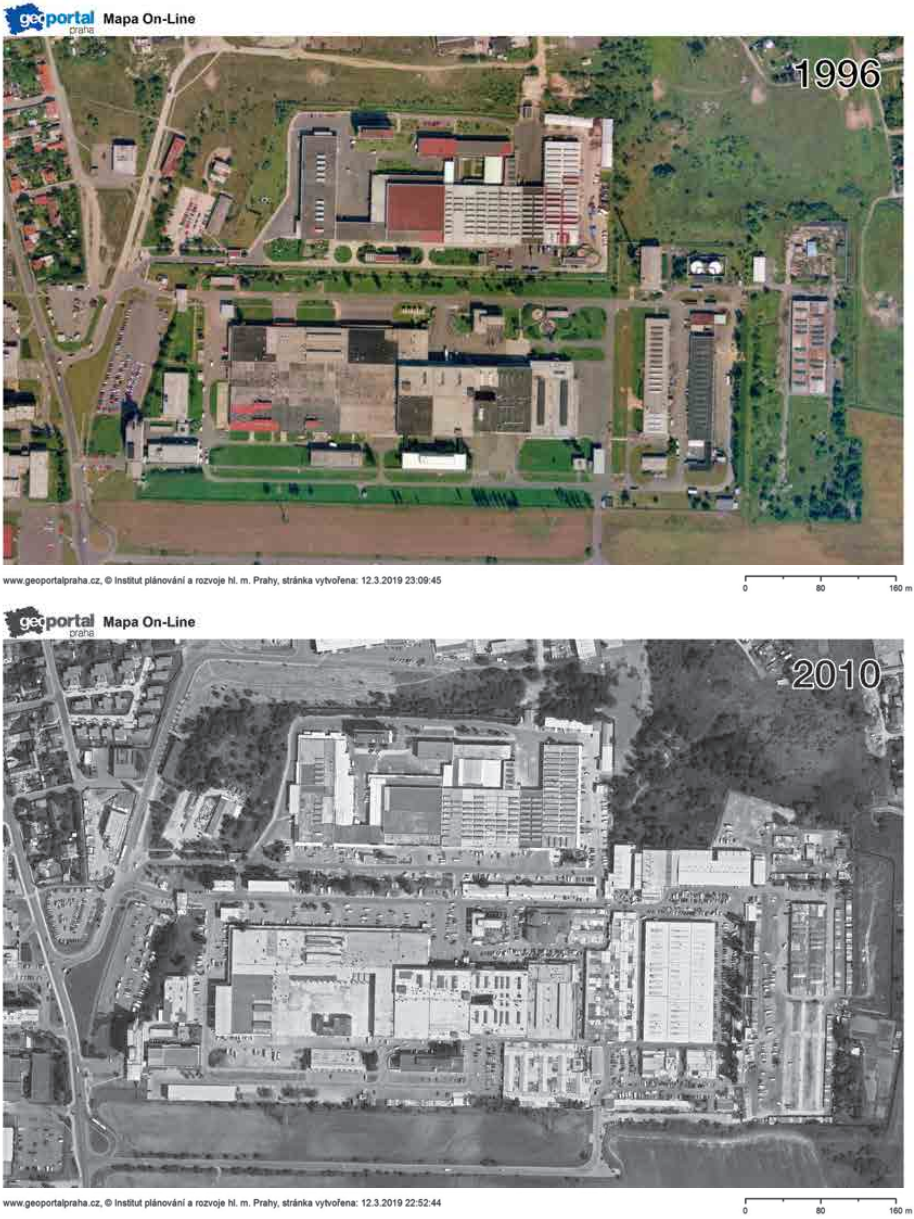

Figure 12: Above, the Sapa Marketplace site as it appeared in 1996, relatively unchanged from seven years prior; and below, as it appeared in 2010, showing more than a dozen new buildings and numerous cars. Photo: IPR Praha, 2019.

management and merchants also appropriated vestigial structures of the socialist-era Masokombinát. Wholesalers occupied the largest buildings, former factory floors and distribution warehouses, and established storefronts along their loading docks.

Between 2003 and 2007, an area resembling a water storage facility underwent a distinctive transformation. The circular tanks were gradually woven into the commercial fabric of the marketplace. In 1996, the tanks appear unmodified. By 2003, informal market buildings surround the now-disused piece of industrial equipment. By 2009, the tanks were modified into circular buildings and capped with octagonal roofs. Visiting the site in 2018, it was not apparent that these buildings were built within the confines of a piece of disused industrial equipment. However, aerial photos reveal how this inherited structure of the socialist era was adapted to the needs of the marketplace (see Figure 13).[8]

These photos reveal other landscape transformations: green spaces are gradually replaced with vast parking lots; reconstruction efforts owing to a fire that occurred in 2008 show the complete renovation of one of the large Masokombinat warehouses; a larger number of automobiles appears in every successive year.

Such transformations show how new spaces emerged at Sapa both from within and from without the physical legacies of socialism. The "end" of socialism did not correspond to a wiping clean of the landscape it had created; rather, the landscape was gradually reformed in the mould of new economic, social, and political relations. At Sapa, a new class of entrepreneurs built entirely new buildings with entirely new purposes which nevertheless shared foundations (in a metaphorical and quite literal sense) with vestiges of a collapsed system. Moreover, these new physical structures represent emergent economic relationships which were undergirded by the already-prevalent practice of informal exchange endemic to the socialist shortage economy and practiced by a developing merchant class, a theme I will examine in the final section of this paper.

Public spaces, private property, and socialism

The macro-level restructuring of the political economy of Czechia has motivated a ground-level transformation of the spatial environment not only in Prague's iconic spaces, but also in quotidian spaces like Sapa. Turning next to reading

[8] There are annual aerial photos available from 2000 onward; though too numerous to include in the essay, they may be viewed on the IPR Prague database listed in references (n.d.).

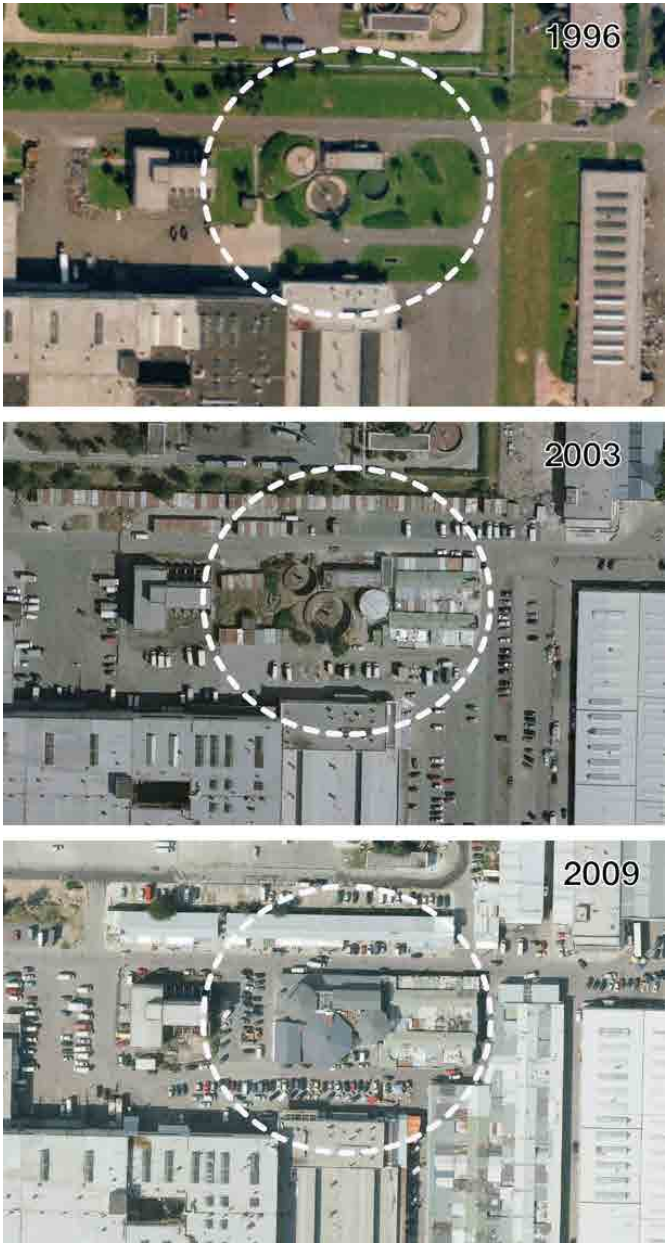

Figure 13: A water storage or treatment plant was gradually transformed into a building for market activity Photo: IPR Praha GeoPortal, 2019.

Sapa in the context of these changes, I suggest that the urban form of Sapa reflects a post-socialist, as well as Lefebvrian production of space.

Stalinov (2007) argues that socialist governments in Central and Eastern Europe wrought significant change to the nature of urban public spaces, here defined as material spaces for common use (parks, playgrounds, squares, streets, train and bus stations, beaches). Yet the expropriation of urban spaces under CEE socialist systems extended to the "private realm" – homes, commercial offices and storefronts, and other forms of private real property. This process resulted in much of space in general becoming "public space" in some sense of the phrase: Stalinov points out that in Yugoslavia and in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic "all urban land was appropriated by the state" (ibid., 270).[9] Perhaps as much as three-quarters of urban land was held in public ownership, a ratio that was "more or less inverse" in cities in the West, where approximately one third of urban land was publicly held. Significantly more of the socialist city was "public space"; at the same time, a significantly higher proportion of the socialist city was public space (ibid.).

Yet socialist cities "significantly curtailed" one of the vital functions of urban public spaces in pre-socialist Europe: their use as marketplaces (ibid.). To fill the vacuum left by limitations on commerce and public religious life, traditionally important public spaces (central market squares, main boulevards, etc.) were filled with ideological symbols and monuments, programmed with coordinated mass events such as parades, and appropriated for other politically important projects (ibid., 271).

Much of the remainder of the socialist city was constituted by "an abundance of desolate, unkempt, and undifferentiated open spaces" that were devoid of any clear functional purpose other than social interaction, which diffused thinly across the vast landscape of public open spaces (ibid.). These sorts of spaces can still be observed in the immense housing estates on the outskirts of most major CEE cities, though paradoxically many such spaces are now held in private hands.

The Sapa site was part and parcel of this project of socialist landscape transformation. Czepcynski (2008) has argued that the urban landscape transformations under socialism constituted a "totalization of landscape" which left "very little room, if any, for neutrality ... in culture and cultural landscape under

[9] The exact details of land tenure were not consistent across the Soviet republics, so I use RSFSR narrowly here.

socialism" (ibid., 107). The Sapa site constitutes an element of the socialist system of landscape production. Its gradual transformation from socialist enterprise to urban marketplace, far from the iconic centre of Prague, is not marked by sensational moments comparable to the toppling of a statue or the destruction of a communist symbol. Yet it is no less characteristic of the effects of transition on the urban landscape. Czepczynski conceptualises landscape transformation as a discursive process which "[becomes] part of the everyday ... the objective, and the natural, [masking] the artifice and ideological nature of its form and content" (ibid., 41). Sapa arose through such discursive process – the post-socialist transition – and has become a kind of spatialisation of the Vietnamese-Czech experience in Prague, a process which Czepczynski reminds is strongly connected to the making and fixing of representation: "Spatialization is often equivalent to hegemonization: the production of an ideological closure" (ibid., 42). In the case of Sapa, this "ideological closure" could be said to operate both from the perspective of the Vietnamese-Czech and the Czechs: more so than any other wholesale market, Sapa has come to *represent* something about the Vietnamese-Czech minority in the minds of its tenants and interlocutors alike. Czepczynski has also conceptualised Central and Eastern European landscape transformations within the binary of Circulation-Iconography, a tension between openness and closedness, the multiple particularities of Sapa suggest the need for a non-binary, non-essential approach to landscape interpretation that does not seek resolution as an end in itself (ibid., 180).

Berdahl et al. (2000) have offered a possible path forward, describing the post-socialist landscape as "rife with contradiction", arguing for the importance of examining "how extralocal economic, political, and social processes intersect with the individual lives of people in a community" (ibid., 5). Internal idiosyncrasies and contradictions of the recent history of Sapa challenge clear narratives of urban landscape transformation. Originally established as a peripheral industrial complex and aimed to deliver urban wealth to the near rural suburbs, the marketplace is now of central importance to wholesale trade in Prague, and magnifies the effects of globalisation on the surrounding area. Tenants and merchants appropriated the physical structures of a socialist development to construct a thoroughly un-socialist marketplace. Previously held in public ownership but not accessible as a public space, the site which now houses Sapa is currently accessible to members of the public but held in private ownership.

These two spatial modes – publicly owned but inaccessible and privately owned but accessible – constitute an articulation of space which is characteristic

of paradoxes of the post-socialist period. One approach is to assert that the post-socialist period has comprised an "enclosure of the commons" through the privatisation of the assets and spaces of the socialist state. At the same time, the privatisation of publicly owned land and buildings has often resulted in new kinds of public access and activities. Stalinov (2007) and Berdahl et al. (2000) work to show that public ownership under socialism never guaranteed publicly accessible or useable spaces. Sapa represents a helpful reversal of the same principle: that private ownership does not guarantee restrictions on access. The contradictory relationship between "public" and "private" as principle of ownership speaks to the internal contradictions of public and private life during the socialist and post-socialist periods alike.

Susan Gal (2002) offers a navigational aid within this contradiction in her principle of fractal distinction; that is, that individuals can experience the differences between the semiotic categories of "public" and "private" at different scales and in different registers, depending on context (ibid.). She argues that under CEE socialism, fractal distinctions between public and private were deployed by the state to make and re-make labour relationships, not only between firms and individuals, but also particularly between men and women (ibid.). She argues the public-private binary is rarely "stable and continuous", yet nonetheless can be experienced as such despite "changes in the contents of the distinction" (ibid., 91). The contents of such a distinction are especially relevant in the CEE context, where the manipulation of the discursive relationship between the "public" and "private" represented for communist parties one of the "essential points for transforming bourgeois, capitalist society through social engineering" (ibid., 86).

This discussion is additionally complicated by Hirt's (2012) argument that distinctions between urban spaces according to a public-private binary must be further tailored to the context of CEE socialism. The relationships between public and private in "Eastern Europe ... deviate from Western notions", writes Hirt, the "most obvious difference" being "that the socialist public [realm]... was immeasurably larger than its Western counterpart" (ibid., 18). From the central squares of cities and towns to the arenas of civil society and public discourse, the overwhelming presence of the state in public life imbued citizens with a scepticism toward the public realm (ibid.).

Hirt argues that while the "private realm" tended to shrink in relation to the profundity of the public, private spaces attained a new importance as refuges from the watchful eyes of the state: "What the private lost in size, it

gained in sanctity" (ibid., 19). As a result, she argues, "contrary to conventional wisdom ... socialism did not obliterate the private; it obliterated the public – not as institutions, but as an *ideal*" (ibid., 22). Hirt argues that a key paradigm of the post-socialist period was a reluctance to emphasize the development of the public realm in favour of a focus on private spaces: suburban housing, Western-style shopping malls, auto-oriented commercial and residential developments, etc. (2012).

What Hirt characterises as an erasure of the public in the socialist period reveals the significance of enduring elements of Sapa's physical design. Despite being held in public ownership, the Masokombinat was physically designed as an urban space into which entry was controlled. Vestiges of these controls, in the form of high fences, a wall surrounding the property, and vehicle and pedestrian gates, remain today.

Toward a Lefebvrian reading

The specific circumstances of the transformation of the Sapa site echo broader transformations that occurred in Czechia and around Central and Eastern Europe during the transition. In the case of Sapa, actors operating in a newly liberalised economic arena worked to repurpose and transform a space paradigmatic of modes of socialist production. This process recalls the Lefebvrian maxim that "new social relations demand a new space, and vice-versa" and offers the possibility of exploring Sapa through his conceptualisation of the production of space (Lefebvre 1991, 59).

Sapa can be read within Lefebvre's three-part conception of space as *conceived, perceived,* and *lived* (1991). This trinary conception of space consists of c*onceived space,* that which is conceptualised by those who seek spatial transformation: politicians, urban planners, property investors; *perceived space*, spaces which are produced unwittingly and presupposed within societies; and *lived space,* the space individuals inhabit and experience from their own affective position. Each perspective on the nature of the social production of space is legible in the overlapping urban geographies of the marketplace. *Conceived* of as a socialist enterprise, the Masokombinat came into being as a representation of a spatial future; that is, as an urban plan framed by the political, social, and economic ideologies of the Communist Party. Yet as ideological context changed during the transition, so, too, did the materiality of the Masokombinat site, which was appropriated for new spatial practices amid changing conceptions of the nature of space itself. The resulting affective

landscape – what Lefebvre would call Sapa's "lived space", i.e. the spatial realm of daily life – is often read and narrated by visitors as essentially Vietnamese, and it remains represented that way in most media and some scholarly work. Lefebvre's conception of *perceived* space might challenge this essentialisation as ignoring that Sapa arose from within the presuppositions of the socialist and post-socialist spatial milieux, not from without. Turning next to the historical context of Vietnamese migration to Czechoslovakia, I highlight how a complex-relational approach to reading the landscape adds another perspective on the cityscape of Sapa.

The Vietnamese in Czech(oslovak)ia

The praktikanti and historical immigration patterns

Czechoslovakia emerged among citizens of socialist countries outside Europe as a common destination for education, training, and work. Migration pathways that originated in the socialist ecumene endure in Czechia to this day. Yet most contemporary migration from Vietnam to Czechia has occurred in the 21st century. Media and scholarly representations of the Vietnamese community in Czechia tend to reinforce ethnicity as the essential force in the production of spaces like Sapa. However, while Sapa is an important centre of the Vietnamese community in Central and Eastern Europe, numerous other functions, practices, and identities are legible in the landscape.

Beginning in 1967, Czechoslovakia operated skills-training and guest-worker programs for nationals of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, later the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (hereafter simply Vietnam). The first *praktikanti* (trainees) treaty in 1967 stipulated that Vietnam would send 2,100 citizens to live and work in Czechoslovakia over three to five years, and that Czechoslovakia would bear all costs for the program except for workers' travel to and from Czechoslovakia (Alamgir 2013). The *praktikanti* programs developed over the course of the 1970s, with another 5,000 Vietnamese nationals arriving after 1974. Upon the treaty's renewal in 1980, Czechoslovakia and Vietnam agreed to decrease Czechoslovakia's financial obligations to guest workers, and the resulting agreement allowed Czechoslovak authorities to determine workers' placement according to the needs of the Czechoslovak economy. This difference represented a change from the previous framework, under which Vietnamese workers were trained according to skills demanded in their country of origin (Alamgir 2013).

Under the 1980 agreement, a significantly greater number of Vietnamese guest workers were sent to Czechoslovakia. Drbohlav (2007) estimated that in 1981, between 30,000 and 35,000 Vietnamese guest workers lived in Czechoslovakia. Molterer and Hackl (n.d.) claim that 70,000 to 120,000 Vietnamese nationals lived in Czechoslovakia for periods of four to seven years over the course of the 1980s (Molterer and Hackl n.d.). These figures represent only the number of guest workers temporarily resident in the country – permanent immigration of Vietnamese to Czechoslovakia began with the collapse of the socialist system. At the end of the 1980s, an estimated 13,000 Vietnamese nationals were living in Czechoslovakia (Molterer and Hackl n.d.).

Alamgir and Schwenkel (2020) have provided the most recent estimates of the total population of Vietnamese workers in Czechoslovakia from 1980–1989, an overview of which is provided in the below table:

Year	Total number of Vietnamese workers in Czechoslovakia in a given year
1980	3,529
1981	11,543
1982	21,314
1983	22,446
1984	*
1985	15,300
1986	11,400**
1987	18,900
1988	28,955
1989	35,609

Table 1. Estimated number of Vietnamese workers in Czechoslovakia, 1980–1989 (Alamgir and Schwenkel 2020).

Alamgir and Schwenkel's recent estimate broadly corresponds to previous estimates (2020). Though they qualify that some data is incomplete or missing, their comprehensive estimate suggests a consistent population of approximately 50,000 during the 1980s, or about 0.33% of the total population of Czechoslovakia during that period (ibid.).

Contemporary immigration patterns

Published estimates of the number of Vietnamese nationals living in former Czechoslovakia began in 1998, when the Statistical Office began tracking on an annual basis the number of Vietnamese nationals living in the Czech Republic, though it is not known whether data was collected for publication before 1998. Statistical yearbooks published in 2000 show that between January 1, 1998 and December 31, 1999, a total of 2,013 Vietnamese nationals arrived in the Czech Republic, a figure roughly equal to the number of people who arrived from Ukraine during the same period (Český Statistický Úřad 2000, 122). By 2004, the total population of Vietnamese nationals was publicly available, and between 2004 and 2008, the Vietnamese-national population in the Czech Republic nearly doubled to an estimated 60,255 from 34,248 (ibid., 141). These figures likely undercount Vietnamese holding other nationalities (e.g., ethnically- or linguistically-identified Vietnamese-Czech citizens) and undocumented migrants to the Czech Republic from Vietnam. Perhaps surprisingly, they underscore that most permanent immigration of Vietnamese to the Czech Republic has occurred in the last fifteen years. Unofficial estimates today place the total number of Vietnamese-identifying inhabitants as high as 90,000 (Hüwelmeier 2015). The lack of official counts of the language and ethnic origin of the Vietnamese population of the Czech Republic presents an obstacle to achieving an accurate understanding of its total Vietnamese population.

Brouček and Martínková (2016) argue that post-1989 Vietnamese migration patterns to the Czech Republic and Slovakia differ significantly from pre-1989 patterns. They assert first that the pre-1989 patterns of migration from Vietnam to the Czech Republic were motivated primarily by the political considerations negotiated between Czechoslovakia and Vietnam. However, they argue that current migration patterns are the result of Vietnamese individuals' and familial response to economic opportunity (ibid.). "They have come to sacrifice the *presence* of their lives for material profit, though all-day work and living in *makeshift circumstances*", they write of the Vietnamese-Czech community (emphasis in original) (ibid., 7). Brouček and Martínková claim many Vietnamese migrants have chosen to leave Vietnam as a response to "severe economic distress": the often-temporary transition to life in the Czech Republic presents a viable alternative for those unable to establish financial stability in Vietnam (ibid., 13). They note that stereotypes about the Vietnamese-Czech community persist among Czechs; in particular, they claim assertions of widespread organised criminal

activity within the Vietnamese-Czech community have become more prevalent in Czech media since the beginning of the decade (ibid., 163).

Alena Alamgir (2020) offers additional nuance to the motivations of Vietnamese workers who made the journey to Czechoslovakia, pointing out that individuals and families had varying motivations for relocation to Central and Eastern Europe. Alamgir argues that individual/familial economic considerations motivated migration even before 1989; at the same time, political considerations of the Vietnamese-Czech relationship have continued to influence migration patterns into the present day (ibid.). Alamgir (2013) has also asserted that before 1989, official Czechoslovak state ideology supposedly precluded the possibility of racism under socialism. Still, racial attitudes were inherent to judgements of Vietnamese migrants' ability to demonstrate "honest socialist labour" – criticisms of Vietnamese work ethic by Czechs were infused with racial undertones. Cloaking racial resentment within the ideology of the state allowed racist attitudes regarding Vietnamese migrants to persist, and those attitudes form the basis of continued discriminatory behaviour by Czechs toward members of the Vietnamese-Czech community (ibid., 76–77).

Existing literature suggests public cultural exchange between Czechs and Vietnamese-Czechs is carried out primarily in the context of commerce – and that commercial spaces function as spaces in which Czechs and Vietnamese-Czech are willing and able to cooperate for mutual benefit.

Media and scholarly representations of the Vietnamese-Czech

Čada, et al. (2016) argue that members of the Vietnamese-Czech minority have established a positive public self-image in the proliferation of their ethnic-national cuisine around the city of Prague, which has become ubiquitous in Prague and other cities in Czechia in the past decade. They argue the establishment of Vietnamese restaurants has bolstered the portrayal of Vietnamese-Czech people in Czech media as "acting subjects with their own agency"; second, Vietnamese cuisine is seen by "Czech middle class consumers" as a "welcome addition to the construction of Prague as a modern and cosmopolitan city" and to the "otherwise rather dull Czech gastroscape" (ibid.). The result is a common "gastroscape" in Prague, in which Vietnamese food is brought into material proximity with the daily experience of many Praguers, the majority of whom are Czech. Still, Čada argues, the success of Vietnamese cuisine depends to some extent on catering to Czech tastes: Čada et al. illustrate how one small group of "creative class" Praguers engaged in a tour of Sapa Market rely on the authority

of restaurant critics and "foodies" to judge the "[e]xotisicm, authenticity, and difference" of Vietnamese food (ibid.). Restaurateurs must therefore appeal to Czech tastes while also emphasising "authenticity" and difference. The positive self-image of the Vietnamese-Czech in the minds of Czechs is premised on the benefits that *Czechs* receive, and dependent on the adherence by Vietnamese-Czech restaurateurs to the tastes of their Czech customers.

The emergence of a more positive media representation from the Czech perspective of Vietnamese people living in Czechia depends on a narrative of diligent labour and honest entrepreneurship. Vietnamese-Czechs have come to be viewed by Czechs in a positive light as a consequence of their efforts to establish businesses and a common perception that they work harder and more consistently than Czechs. A common refrain in my interviews and conversations while in Prague was the assertion, mostly by Czechs, that many Czechs preferred the simplicity of working a set schedule and collecting a regular salary, whereas many Vietnamese-Czechs sought out opportunities to build independent businesses and worked tirelessly to achieve financial success. While these stereotypes skewed toward what I am sure my subjects believed were positive characterisations, as I will show, this particular stereotype has insidious origins.

The belief among Czechs that Vietnamese-Czech people work exceptionally hard echoes the socialist-era concept of "honest socialist labour" articulated to different political-economic circumstances. Alamgir illustrates the centrality of labour to pre-1989 Czechoslovakian state-socialist racial discourse, arguing the state sought to articulate race as a mutable characteristic which could be changed and even "erased" by one's ability to demonstrate "honest socialist labour", that is, productive work in service of the state. Official ideology *a priori* "prevented" racism from existing in Czechoslovakia; however, Alamgir demonstrates how Czechoslovaks deployed "honest socialist labour" as a proxy for racialised criticism of guest workers (Cubans, Vietnamese, Ethiopians, and others) and of members of the Roma minority:

> [A] man testifying to the police about a brawl in a beer pub is quoted as saying that the Vietnamese sitting at a neighbouring table were loud, and that he [the Czech man] and his companions "were critical of them, and we were saying that they should return back to Vietnam; they don't work anyway and money is paid to them unnecessarily" (Alamgir 2013).

For state authorities, criticism of a group's gratitude toward and productivity on behalf of the state was a tolerable resignification of racism that also promoted the primary importance of the subject's labour relationship to the state. "Honest socialist labour" was the precept by which guest workers and ethnic minorities could solidify their position as subjects entitled to state protection; at the same time, Czechoslovaks who deployed evidence of its absence in others could enforce an oblique racial hierarchy that was officially prohibited.

Neither an exoticized formulation of race nor one based in "honest socialist labour" is mutually exclusive; that is, one does not preclude the other. Still, the tendency in English-language media (a significant source of information on Sapa for visitors, especially) is to prefer exoticized narratives.

English-language and foreign media

Relatively few articles concerning Sapa have been published in English-language media; however, within this limited set, two dominant trends have emerged. Stories written for a tourist audience ("feature-style articles") tend to focus on Sapa's exotic character, emphasising the "otherness" of the marketplace. In particular, a trope has emerged that visiting Sapa is like visiting Vietnam itself:

> Inside the lot that constitutes Sapa, Prague's 'Little Vietnam,' it's easy to pretend one has travelled to another country ... At Sapa, you can pretend, if only for an afternoon, you have been transported to another country entirely (Storm 2015).

> [S]kip the travel agent -- you don't need a ticket to Vietnam ... I feel like I have been transported to some far away land, certainly nothing like historical, baroque Prague ... I see Vietnamese merchants not only trading, but also cooking meals mostly intended for their fellow Vietnamese workers (Crane 2015).

> SAPA [sic] is about as close as you are going to get to feeling like you are in Hanoi ... while you are still, in fact, in Prague ... At certain moments, and from certain angles, you can almost forget the prefab housing which surrounds the Vietnamese market, and believe that you are on a completely different continent (Johnston 2008).

A 2010 episode of the American television show *Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations* features a three-minute segment on Prague's Vietnamese-Czech community that includes a visit to Sapa. Bourdain's guest, Tina, a Vietnamese-Czech woman whom he meets at the renowned First Republic-era Café Savoy,

describes Sapa: "at the market, Sapa, there is everything you need" (Bourdain 2010). Bourdain narrates their subsequent visit: "Sapa is like a commercial compound. One-hundred-percent Vietnamese and one-hundred-percent unhappy about cameras within the perimeter. Getting a pho shop to agree to be filmed here took a lot of doing" (ibid.).

We cannot read too much into such a short segment. Yet Bourdain tends to reproduce existing stereotypes about Sapa as a closed, extraterritorial "compound" made up by a monolithic "Vietnamese" (notably, not "Vietnamese-Czech") population that is sceptical of if not hostile to outsiders: Bourdain narrates his crew's difficulty negotiating filming permission with Sapa's managers, and characterises them as "the mysterious market overlords, who told us we could shoot only in the shop and not other businesses. Everything *nice* and *friendly*", quips Bourdain (ibid.; emphases added).

A 2010 Vice magazine article entitled "Big Fun in Little Hanoi" (a revealing reference to the 1986 martial arts comedy *Big Trouble in Little China* starring Kurt Russell) offers perhaps the most caricatured representation of Sapa:

> "Wow, it looks like a Jackie Chan movie", shouts our marvelled friend as we plunge into the metal inside of the Vietnamese marketplace, SAPA ... we're surrounded by small restaurants offering exotic food and huge halls loaded to the rooftop with cheap clothes ... [Y]ou catch a whiff of something similar to monkey faeces every now and then ... besides sweaty shop-keepers, you may very well come across individuals capable of inducing some serious erotic tickling (Děd and de Babraque 2010).

While the offensive tone of this particular article is an extreme example, such a condescending attitude toward Vietnamese-Czech people is typical of media published for Czech-speaking and English-speaking audiences alike (this particular article was published by Vice in Czech first and later translated to English): In every case these authors represent Sapa as an essentially Vietnamese space. With the added implication that to experience Sapa's "Vietnamese-ness" is to be alienated from Prague itself, the authors implore readers to forget the surrounding landscape – suggesting Sapa's physical space is produced as a reflection of the essentially Vietnamese character of the people who work at the market, "Vietnamese merchants" and their "fellow ... workers" (Crane 2015), but not as a product of the social, political, and economic relations that undergird the broader cityscape of Prague. These "one-hundred percent

Vietnamese" characteristics, the authors imply, render the marketplace a space apart, discontiguous to its surroundings and necessarily understood as distinct from it.

In contrast to feature-style articles, news articles published in English-language media typically report on crime. A 2016 newswire report from Czech Radio reads: "Hygiene officers inspecting Prague's Vietnamese Sapa market uncovered 35 tons of uncertified frozen meat in storage ... According to the inspectors the meat was sold to Vietnamese restaurants around town, presenting a serious health risk. Sapa management faces a million crown fine. The matter is being further investigated" (Lazarová 2016). A 2010 Radio Prague story reported, "The [Libuš] town hall has recently complained of growing tension between the Czech and Vietnamese communities in the area, where they say the latter is forming a ghetto [at Sapa]. Although the police have noted no significant increase in crime, the district mayor has warned of problems on the horizon" (Falvey 2010). Despite lacking any substantive allegations or evidence, articles such as these have continued to paint an insidious portrait of Sapa. A 2018 Radio Prague headline read, "Police Crack Down on Illegal Tiger Trade": "[T]he sites raided by the police included Sapa, a large Vietnamese market place [sic] on the southern outskirts of Prague... detained was a Vietnamese national, who is suspected of organising the criminal activity and ensuring the sale of these products in the Sapa market and elsewhere" (Fraňková 2018). Such articles tend to deal in suspicion, with only a thin veneer of objectivity toward the circumstances of alleged criminal acts. Like features articles, these examples of news coverage are characterised by a sensational tone and reinforce conceptions of the marketplace as a space apart from Prague's cityscape, even as a "ghetto". But Sapa cannot be understood as separate from the cityscape. Sapa and its surroundings are constitutive of Prague's cityscape. A Lefebvrian critique of media representations of Sapa would point out that such characterisations "fall into the trap of treating space 'in itself', as space as such" (Lefebvre 1991, 90). The marketplace cannot therefore be treated as a thing "in itself" or as a thing apart, but rather should be understood as one locus of latent social, political, and economic processes that have characterised the Transition.

The treatment of Sapa as separate from Prague implies a desire on the part of the majority to see itself as a unitary whole, without having to account for or accommodate the ways in which that whole-ness tends to exclude and erase the thousands of ethnic non-Czechs who are nonetheless Czechian – in citizenship, in language, and in other ways. The distancing of Sapa in media reinforces

the idea that Sapa and its multinational community are not representative of Czechia, rather, they are an aberration in its midst. Though perhaps less overt, media representations like these are not unconnected to the racism of far-right and neo-Nazi groups toward Vietnamese-Czechs, Roma, and other minority peoples. Such groups have spatialised their ethno-nationalist worldview in Czechia with protest chants of "Czechia for the Czechs" (Cameron 2013).

Fractured and Multiple Geographies

I have explored how Sapa has been conceptualised as a "Vietnamese" space. Such characterisations are fraught with essentialisation and obscure the overlapping identities, functions, and practices located at Sapa. Furthermore, they encourage an essential worldview which excludes and erases the existing multinational realities of Czechia. Analysing this landscape in its multiplicity requires seeing Sapa differently and suspending the essentialised perspective.

Massey (2013) writes that urban space is "relational, not a mosaic of simply juxtaposed differences" conceptualised as "a meeting-place, of jostling, potentially conflicting, trajectories ... this implies an identity that is, internally, fractured and multiple" (ibid.). In examining Sapa, one can see the market not as a place where differences are juxtaposed, but rather where trajectories – of individuals, from merchants to visitors, or the trajectories of capital – intersect and enter into negotiation. Following Massey's (1994) rumination on Kilburn High Road in London, I wish to suggest that Sapa's spatial identity need not be statically defined – it is neither "seamless" nor coherently understood in the same way by everyone (ibid.).

Visiting the market, one is immediately struck by the relative diversity of individuals engaged in commerce. Czechia is 97% ethnically Czech; yet within Sapa people of many nationalities, ethnicities, and languages work alongside one another. At Sapa I met merchants from across Eurasia: Turkey, Mongolia, India, China, Ukraine, and Vietnam. I discussed in French with a man from Delhi the prices for goods manufactured in China and food grown just down the highway, south of Prague. I observed cars and trucks from across Europe – South, Central, East, and West – making deliveries and pickups. A similar impression may be drawn from the range of license plates observable on trucks and vans: mostly Czechian, Slovakian, Polish, German, and Hungarian, but also Bulgarian and Turkish; Russian and Ukrainian. Far from a monocultural enclave I found Sapa to be more akin to a microcosm of a port city: outward-looking, multilingual, and preoccupied with trade.

So, too, does the vibrant, multilingual streetscape inside Sapa reflect this linguistic, cultural, and social "jostling" of those who visit the marketplace. The aforementioned air travel advertisement (see Figure 3) reflects one way in which differences are accommodated: a multilingual Czech- and Vietnamese-language sign advertising flights on the Russian flag carrier airline to Hanoi. Other symbols aim to communicate with a specifically Vietnamese-speaking audience; for example, the on-site Buddhist temple, where signs are written exclusively in Vietnamese and the flag of Vietnam flies over the shrine (see Figure 2).

Contrary to widespread characterisations of Sapa as a closed, even secretive, ethnic enclave, the marketplace I experienced was a markedly internationalised space where disparate countries of origin and polyglot communication are the norm. Indeed, it is because of this international perspective that market activity is possible: Sapa primarily connects the supply chains of East and Southeast Asia with those of Central and Eastern Europe, acting as a gateway not only to Prague and Czechia but also to Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Austria, Germany and beyond. Consider the scenario of a single suitcase that might pass through Sapa: In a factory outside Yiwu, China, a hard-sided suitcase is pressed from a thin layer of plastic. It is shipped to a distribution centre where it is loaded along with hundreds of identical suitcases onto a freight train bound for Czechia via Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus and Poland. In two weeks, it will be loaded onto a truck in Prague and transferred to a merchant holding Czech citizenship and born to Vietnamese parents in what used to be East Germany. At Sapa it will sold among a lot of suitcases to a retailer in Bratislava, Slovakia and eventually purchased by a Cuban graduate student. Such transactions occur every day at Sapa.

Sapa need not be understood as an "enclave" or even as a "community" in order to be thought of spatially; on the contrary, spatialising Sapa necessitates a fuller unfolding of its internal fragmentation and conflicts while also recognising that linkages to Sapa's "outside" are themselves constitutive of the marketplace, and vice versa. Massey (1994) guides this approach toward an unbounded definition of the Sapa as a locus of intersecting processes, practices, and identities.

Sapa has been influenced by many groups and formed in a heterogenous context. Approaching one aspect of Sapa's organisation, namely, informality in the private sector following the collapse of Socialism, I aim in the final section of this paper to parse one band of the spectrum of complex interrelated configurations of the post-socialist city.

Informality and the "Secondary Economy"

To explore one additional perspective on the interrelated configurations of Sapa as a post-socialist space, I turn next to the process by which informality endemic to the socialist economy has come to constitute a motivating force of market activity within present-day Czechia. Informal economic practices rooted in the "secondary economies" of the socialist era helped to undergird and accelerate the expansion of marketplaces after 1989. Vietnamese guest workers residing in Czechoslovakia during the socialist period were accustomed to navigating the secondary economies and the "grey-market" import/export system between their two countries (Williams and Baláž 2005; Alamgir 2018). At the same time, trade licenses constituted one of the only ways for Vietnamese-Czechs to obtain visas to remain in Czechoslovakia legally (Williams and Baláž 2005). Sapa Market was part of a broader trend illustrative of the diverse economic responses to the command economy's collapse.

Informality and "open" borders

Under Socialism, the urban marketplace as a spatial form did not disappear. Rather, state-owned firms took over the operation of traditional marketplaces, as in the case of Pražka trznice, Prague's traditional farmers market. Informal markets, which were officially tolerated to varying extents across Central and Eastern Europe, were an integral part of the region's "shortage economies", in which consumer goods were in short supply (Sik and Wallace 1999). Neef (2002) argues that informal economic activity flourished in the immediate post-socialist period amid the collapse of more centralized distribution channels. That informal economic activity was already prevalent in most CEE command economies allowed the rapid growth of the informal sector during the transition (ibid.). The most visible of these informal structures before the transition were open-air markets found to varying extents in cities in Central and Eastern Europe (ibid.). Informal though they were, open-air markets helped fulfil the needs of consumers who contended with frequent disruptions in the provision of certain goods via official channels. Owing to this essential role in the command economy, open-air markets survived and thrived amid the transition, not merely maintaining but expanding their important role in the everyday economy (ibid.). According to Sik and Wallace, the relationship between formal Communist structure and informal "secondary" structures before the transition provided a framework for life in a market society:

> People used to behaving resourcefully by combining different sources of economic activity continued to use these skills in a new environment, and the skills used for surviving in a Communist society turned out to be very useful ones for surviving in a post-Communist one as well (Piirainen, 1997; Wallace, 1998) ... Far from not having the values associated with market capitalism, they developed these values very quickly and in fact were already familiar with them from activity in the former second economy (Sik and Wallace, 1999, 700).

The shortages endemic to the command economy before 1989 worsened in the immediate post-socialist period. Yet as macro systems faltered, newly liberalised travel policies, long restricted in Czechoslovakia and across the region, allowed individuals to cross into Western territory and engage in small-scale transnational trade. The lethargy of the formal sector stood in stark contrast with the dynamism and agility of these early entrepreneurs and informal economy: soon, practically anything that could be sold was being trafficked among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Sik and Wallace 1999).

The quirks of border liberalisation played a key role in the proliferation of marketplaces that were run by and in many cases catered to Asian migrants to Czechoslovakia, in particular the Vietnamese-Czechs. Klaus Molterer and Joachim Hackl (n.d.) argue that the Czechoslovak handling of its hard border with Austria resulted in a 2-km strip of land between Austrian and Czechoslovak customs that remained "in between" jurisdictions after the opening of the border in 1989:

> The unique situation along the Czechoslovakian border allowed the development of duty-free shops set in between two customs posts enabling the sale of goods exempt from taxation for a fraction of the Austrian price level. The first duty-free Shop, named "Excalibur City", opened in 1992 on the grounds of former Hatě, one of the villages demolished during the clearance of the border area [in 1950] (ibid.).

Higher-tax goods such as alcohol and cigarettes were available to Western consumers at cut-rate prices at border-region markets like Excalibur City. These liminal spaces attracted marginal labour: sex workers from across the Eastern Bloc, members of the Roma minority, and, of particular interest to this paper, Vietnamese people rendered unemployed and lacking a clear path to permanent residency with the collapse of communism (ibid.).

Vignettes like these reflect the numerous responses by individuals to systemic economic issues before and during the transition. The alternative economic practices developed under socialism, especially informality, undergirded the expansion of marketplaces into the urban realm of the post-socialist city, and at the same time came to provide for thousands of Vietnamese guest workers a livelihood and legal basis for remaining in Czechoslovakia.

A diverse economy

Gibson-Graham (2002) has argued for a conceptual frame in which activities often defined under the umbrella of "capitalism" are parsed into non-essential, discursive categories. Their work offers a framework for a more granular approach to understanding "the economy" outside a hegemonic framing of capitalism. What Gibson-Graham has called the "diverse economy" attempts to recognise alternative- and non-market, non-wage, and non-capitalist activities as necessarily constitutive of "the economy", rather than separate from it. In a diverse economy approach, the binary frames of market/non-market or capitalist/non-capitalist are resignified as "multiple particularities" of given economic landscapes. Gibson-Graham consider capital relations but do not hegemonize them: a diverse economy examines cultures of bartering, care labour within families, non-profit advocacy, etc. as elements of "the economy" rather than its externalities. Situating these practices as distinct from "capitalism", Gibson-Graham works to show how economies are constituted by wide varieties of socioeconomic relationships, processes, and practices (ibid.; see Table 2).

Following Gibson-Graham, Sapa can be approached as exemplary of a diverse economy. At Sapa, informal economic relations are pervasive. Bargaining is the norm; deals are often made on promise of payment or a handshake; cash is overwhelmingly preferred. Tereza Friedingerová, a scholar of and advocate for the Vietnamese-Czech community with close ties to Sapa told me of large Vietnamese-Czech families at Sapa:

> They don't use the traditional finance market ... they get investment money within the [Vietnamese] diaspora ... They don't sign any contract – they say, hey, I need 3 million crowns. "Okay, come tomorrow, and we'll get 3 million cash". Everything is based on trust (personal communication, 29 May, 2018).

Informality extends to rental agreements: multilevel subleases of market stalls allow newcomers to gain access to the market's customers if a space opens up,

Transactions	Labor	Enterprise
MARKET	WAGE	CAPITALIST
Alternative Market Sale of public goods Ethical "fair-trade" markets Local trading systems Alternative currencies Underground market Co-op exchange Barter Informal market	*Alternative Paid* Self-employed Cooperative Indentured Reciprocal labor In-kind Work for welfare	*Alternative Capitalist* State enterprise Green capitalist Socially responsible firm Nonprofit
Nonmarket Household flows Gift giving Indigenous exchange State allocations State appropriations Gleaning Hunting, fishing, gathering Theft, poaching	*Unpaid* Housework Family care Neighborhood work Volunteer Self-provisioning labor Slave labor	*Noncapitalist* Communal Independent Feudal Slave

Table 2: Gibson-Graham's diverse economy, diagrammed (Gibson-Graham 2002, xiii).

leaving little if any written record. Non-wage and non-market activities are common, too: children watch over parents' stalls in their absence. Mothers tend to children in addition to their responsibilities as shopkeepers. And, commerce remains only one aspect of life at Sapa. Sapa's Buddhist shrine, its kindergarten, and its full calendar of social events, from New Year's celebrations to beauty pageants, each constitute an element of non-commercial, non-capitalist activity which nonetheless characterises the marketplace.

These "openings" provided by Gibson-Graham point to how Sapa can be understood not only as a "marketplace" but as something more – at the same time, they show how the term marketplace, despite its association with capitalist commercialism, is itself a layered term, especially in the post-socialist context. Gibson-Graham offers the conceptual frame that helps to situate Sapa not only as a locus of post-socialist "capitalism" but also as an embodiment of the contradictions and complexities of the post-socialist transition. Political, economic, and social relationships – bilateral economic ties, representations

of race, supply chains – whose roots trace to the socialist era are transformed and reproduced by contemporary flows of goods and labour. Gibson-Graham reveals how these diverse relationships are not always subsumed by capitalism but rather can be distinguished from and placed into dialogue with it.

Conclusion: Toward the City as a Text

Sapa developed in the context of far-reaching regional changes, and exploring its development helps to unfold and inspect an example of post-socialist transition in the city. During its seven-decade history, the Sapa site has been constantly formed and re-formed in the mould of new socio-spatial relations. Sapa can be said to be a Vietnamese-Czech cultural space, a marketplace, an urban place. It can be called a capitalist space or a post-socialist space. But its portrait cannot be, nor should it be, flattened into a caricature. At the same time, it need not be limited to a single portrait at all. This paper has been an attempt to offer new insights and perspectives, to offer another representation.

Seeking not to resolve the sometimes-contradictory nature of Sapa, I suggest that it can function as a kind of case study of the differential geographies and idiosyncrasies of post-socialism itself. Sapa can serve as an example of the imbricated configurations of economic, political, and social relations that have proliferated since 1989, and how they are articulated to the everyday lives of the people who inhabit and produce them. This possibility points toward the need to further encourage a regionally-specific urban geography attentive to everyday spaces. The methodological challenges of conducting research on everyday space are myriad precisely because of its everyday-ness; its impermanence. However, archival GIS and growing digital paper trails available thanks to social media and digital governance initiatives, in addition to interviews and observation, present new pathways into overlooked spaces.

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