

# THE ROLE OF POPULAR CULTURE IN RURAL-TO-URBAN TRANSFORMATION CONTRIBUTING TO THE “SLUŠOVICE MIRACLE”<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *The submitted article provides inquiry into the role of popular culture in the everyday life of Slušovice – the socialist “center municipality” and extraordinary isle of prosperity in the scarce economy of Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s. It presents research on the popular culture of the formative political environment of state socialism. The urbanisation and suppression of traditional culture in this village was not isolated from the broader context, but was derived from the economic transformation of the local collective farm and its symbolic differentiation from socialism. In these intentions, the study tries to expand the specific dimensions of the emergent popular culture with its emphasis on huge cultural events, showing the hybridity of social life in Slušovice, which was created by the combination of rural transformation and consumer culture.*

**Keywords:** *Slušovice collective farm; popular culture; everyday life; state socialism*

The period known as Normalization is considered to be a time of stagnation and decline in the economic, political, and cultural fields, especially for the urban population of the Czech lands (see Valeš 2014). However, the situation of rural areas in the 1970s and 1980s was not so sceptical, since the Czechoslovak government managed to achieve satisfactory results in agriculture that were not lagging behind developed countries in the West (see Průcha 2009: 739). An example of a village where rural modernization was particularly remarkable

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<sup>1</sup> This study was supported by Charles University, project GA UK No. 235115.

is Slušovice, located in south-eastern Moravia. In the following pages, I will therefore address the role of popular culture in the transformation of a provincial village into a first-class socialist village similar to a town.

As the basis for my analysis of the mutual intersection of rural and urban forms in local popular culture, I chose three case events that took place in the village in the observed period of the 1980s. My aim is to show what attitudes and values these events were meant to direct the spectator towards, as well as what values they attributed to the rural environment.

Social events organised under the authority of the Local National Committee (MNV) Slušovice in the periphery of the inhabited area represent the main contribution to the paper, as was the initial intention of the research. Such events included horse races, discotheques (or, discos), and a TV contest programme with music numbers. The study is not based on anthropological stationary field research, which would be focused, for example, on the social structure and institutions in Slušovice. Apart from using interviews with Slušovice inhabitants, the paper is also supported by written and audio-visual archive materials.<sup>2</sup> The aim is to introduce different ways of creating a new community ethos in a collectivised village by means of popular culture.

Literature on the modernization of the Czech countryside during the observed period is scarce; it includes classic historical works, as well as works written from a social science perspective. A major contribution to this study is made by the book *Rolník a krajina* (Lapka – Gottlieb 2000); although it mainly reflects the knowledge of Czech private farmers at the beginning of the 1990s, it comprises the specification of urban and rural cultures as well, and it also depicts the image of the socialist country through farmers' points of view and values. A work by Norwegian anthropologist Haldis Haukanes (2004) is also based on interviews from the same period, yet it especially describes the set of values of collective farmers, and thus shows their image that better reflects the traditional sample of rural population. Other important sources include complex works by economic historian Václav Průcha (2009) and sociologist Lenka Kalinová (2012). The concept of tension between the town and the country is relevantly mentioned in studies by Czech historian Lukáš Valeš (2012), Scottish economic historian Nigel Swain (1994), and American cultural historian Paulina Bren (2013). The topic of Czech popular culture between socialism and

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<sup>2</sup> These are materials from the State District Archive in Zlín (SOka Zlín), the Security Services Archive (ABS), and the Czech Television Archive and the Program Funds (APF ČT).

post-socialism has up until now been addressed primarily in the compilation of works edited by Jakub Machek (2010) and in works by Přemysl Houda (2014).

The aforementioned works help explain certain terms that are used in this paper. These are particularly the terms of rural culture and traditional folk culture. The pair of authors Lapka – Gottlieb (2000: 106–107) consider the following attributes to be the signs of European rural culture – humane relationship towards land (landscape, nature, and soil) and animals, conservatism in adopting new ideologies, immobility of the rural community and thus its territorial delimitation, faith in transcendental powers, and efforts to preserve awareness of rural culture, which is allegedly of more importance to the community than specific economic profit. Besides this awareness, the rural community itself is characterized by family bonds, social control, and cooperation; its form is distinguished by typical songs, dances, clothes and festivals (Lapka – Gottlieb 2000: 112).

The concept of rural culture is, however, only conceivable as the contrast to urban culture, as these two notions are opposed to each other. The features of urban culture are therefore described in the book *Rolník a krajina* using such terms as little social control, individualism, global community, competition, and competitiveness (Lapka – Gottlieb 2000: 108). Just as rural culture is linked to traditional folk culture (yet not only this one), traditional urban values are connected to popular culture, since urban culture can be described as an activity of mass production and reception, which is being spread for commercial and promotional purposes (Machek 2010: 12).

The book's findings about private farmers are valuable, because they create a specific ideally-typical image that can be gradually adapted based on empirical research.<sup>3</sup> The field research of Haldis Haukanes is very helpful in adjusting this image; the distinctive feature between the country and the town in social life is determined to be self-sufficient farming and external impression of community relationships in the country, bearing in mind that despite existing stereotypes about urban and rural lives, both lifestyles are approaching each other more or less dynamically as a consequence of the unification of society (Haukanes 2004: 140). It is therefore apparent from the different interpretation of rural and urban

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<sup>3</sup> The image was ideally-typical since it was created based on a narrow group within the village range; it included people who resisted the pressure of collectivisation and the concentration on agriculture, and also those who decided to do their private business on the returned agricultural land. Most of them refused the radical modernization experiment, and they fell back into the traditional values of the country as described by the authors.

cultures that its evaluation is subjective, and it depends, among other things, on the existential values of both the respondents and the interviewers.

An important term for distinguishing between urban and rural cultures is the term *country*, which covers a broader semantic field than a *village*. The *country* is explained by the authors as being located outside of industrial zones, since agricultural production is predominant here (Lapka – Gottlieb 2000: 114). In their opinion, the *country* represents space also for small- and medium-sized towns that have their own subculture and social functions as well as *villages*, where social differentiation is not large and informal authorities are respected. It is therefore mainly characterized by the different way of life of a community in a healthy environment that serves both for recreation and a luxurious lifestyle (Lapka – Gottlieb 2000: 114–115). In the following text, I will show to what extent the activities in Slušovice reflected this rather romantic picture of life in the *country*, meanwhile it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that urbanisation does not take place in a vacuum, and neither did it trigger the described changes.

### **On the way toward town**

Before analysing the individual public events, I will briefly introduce the historical context and the specific situation in Slušovice. In the described period, the Czech countryside was administered within a system of Centres that facilitated access to foodstuffs and material help for collective farms, to better infrastructure, and to housing construction. These efforts in the field of the territorial organization of society were also typical for the broader European space (Hudečková – Lošťák – Ševčíková 2010: 45), although they differed in the level of force used to implement the plans of bureaucratic authorities. In the European context, it was particularly the example of the systematisation of Romanian villages that was infamous for its violent mode.<sup>4</sup> According to sociologist Jan Tauber (1965: 127), the administrative fusion of municipalities and collective farms was meant to help achieve not only the economic concentration and industrialization of agriculture, but also ideological goals, such as bolstering the party's life and choosing the best workers in the broad area of interconnected municipalities.

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<sup>4</sup> In Romania, 7–8 thousand villages out of 13,123 were planned to disappear in order to remove inequality between the town and the country; the rest was meant to be demolished and 50–55% of it remodeled (see Duta 2012: 8–9).

The convergence of rural and urban areas was influenced by the ongoing unification of society in the whole of Europe, especially by means of secularised education and industrialization (Horská – Musil – Maur 2002). Besides these waves of modernization, the countryside itself was being “modernised” through what is known as the collectivisation of agriculture, which took place mainly in the 1950s.<sup>5</sup> Its most important material consequence in the 1980s was the existence of agricultural cooperatives in the country called collective farms (JZDs), and state enterprises cultivating some 95% of the country’s agricultural land (Průcha 2009: 750). These were frequently the employers of most villagers, as the population in the originally agricultural country was violently coerced to join the collective farms with the land they worked on (by law, they could not own other land<sup>6</sup>) in the 1950s. This fact – together with the elimination of traditional rural authorities, the abolition of local government structures in the country, and the repression of the Catholic church in particular – led to the devastation of social life in the country (Rokoský – Svoboda 2013). However, twenty years of building Central Municipalities and their fusion with collectivised collective farms gave a stimulus to the resuscitation of culture in all bigger communities, at least (Průcha 2009: 756). Successfully fused collective farms with hundreds of employees could afford not only investments in modern facilities and the construction of new compounds, they could also support the leisure activities of villagers in cooperation with the Local National Committees (MNVs).

Unsurprisingly, the Slušovice municipality thus entered the public awareness at the end of the 1970s thanks to its very prosperous collective farm.<sup>7</sup> To create a better picture of the collective farm activities, I present the following facts. The base for creating an agricultural facility was provided by the national fusion of collective farms in 1976; however, the incorporation of neighbouring farms in Slušovice was already occurring through their own initiative every year since 1971.<sup>8</sup> Among the Czechoslovak agricultural facilities, this one was comparably a rather small agricultural business with 8,104 ha of agricultural land and 3,260 active members, owning 260 lorries, 240 tractors, and planes (Slinták 2012: 43). It consisted of 20 production plants that comprised the

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<sup>5</sup> Due to deliberate violations of the ethics of legal standards, collectivisation took many forms, see Burešová (2013).

<sup>6</sup> Act 46/1948 Coll. “On the new land reform.” *Parliament of the Czech republic* [online].

<sup>7</sup> The collective farm in Slušovice is indirectly mentioned e.g. in the well-known 1977 song, *Jožin z bažin* (Joey the Swamp Monster), by the Czech singer Ivan Mládek.

<sup>8</sup> State District Archive Zlín (SOKA), fund JZD AK Slušovice, Inventory, pp. 4–6.

workplaces of 17 municipalities (Slinták 2012: 43). This agricultural-industrial facility did construction work, it exported calves, syrup extracts, and fertilizers within production cooperation with countries in Western Europe, it supplied the national market with vegetables and computers, and it counted upon the development of microelectronics and biotechnologies (Slinták 2012: 43).

According to the definition of authors in the book *Rolník a krajina*, this would hardly be considered the country, since their country is supposed to be located outside industrial zones with no major social differentiation. For our purposes, the authors' notion is adjusted by Nigel Swain (1994: 89), who does not understand the socialist country as a place for recreation to pursue antique rural activities, but as an area with intensive economic activity, where young, educated people move to from towns. The arrival of specialized agricultural workers then increases social differentiation in the country, although it is still not as diverse as in town (Swain 1994: 89, Průcha 2009: 754–755). According to Swain, this change was made possible thanks to professionalization of the collective farms that also pursued non-agricultural, industrial production. Swain mainly talks about Central Municipalities; he mentions the expanded construction of family houses in the country and his perspective – which is closer to the situation in Slušovice – provides a contrast to Lapka – Gottlieb's view.

The fusion of collective farms and of Local National Committees (thanks to which Slušovice became a Central Administrative Municipality for five neighbouring villages on 1 July 1976)<sup>9</sup> was also reflected in demographic growth that seems unprecedented at first sight. Between 1970 and 1991, the population in Slušovice increased by 102 %, to 2,760 people living in 506 houses.<sup>10</sup> However, such growth was not exceptional in Czechoslovakia, as it was often accompanied by a decline in the population decline of many neighbouring villages, which is the case of the municipalities within the scope of the agricultural facility in Slušovice.<sup>11</sup>

It was not until 1996 that the local government in Slušovice managed to formally raise the status of the village to a town. The Act adopted 4 years later

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<sup>9</sup> *Slušovický zpravodaj*, Slušovice: MNV Slušovice, 1976, no. 7; in the 1980s one more municipality came under the MNV.

<sup>10</sup> Population according to census results generated since 1869 in the municipalities and their parts of a selected administrative unit – municipality with extended powers. See “Population according to the census results since 1869 in the villages and their parts”, *Czech Statistical Office* [online].

<sup>11</sup> It was thus not only the case of municipalities affiliated to MNV Slušovice, which means that the JZD was a more powerful integration centre than the system of Central Municipalities created later – their main real contribution was to facilitate communication between the JZD and the authorities of the municipalities where the JZD farmed. *Ibidem*.

set the minimum population of a town to 3,000 inhabitants which was not achieved until 1999 and 2000 in Slušovice; nonetheless, the revocation of the status of a town is only assumed in case of the fusion of two towns.<sup>12</sup> At the time of writing this paper, Slušovice is therefore still formally considered a town.

However, this success in the transition from the rural to the urban environment, as evidenced by the references to the emphasis of the bureaucratic authorities, has greatly helped the formative political environment in which the diligent leadership of the cooperative was well-oriented. The Security Services Archive shows that, in addition to hard work and the combination of lucky coincidences, the political determinants influenced the establishment of the specific local prosperity. This archive, whose materials are to be verified, suggests that the collective farm in the centrally-planned economy had serious problems with fulfilling the indicators of the state economic plan from its own agricultural production. However, with a strong background created by a number of officials<sup>13</sup> and its own abilities, it was able to generate huge financial gains from non-agricultural production, from which it purchased the illegal products needed for the successful fulfillment of the state economic plan.<sup>14</sup>

At the time, when success in business management was not driven by the effectiveness of production itself, but by the support of an authoritative party, the amount of foreign capital, and the public presentation of the economic performance associated with the plan,<sup>15</sup> the collective farm managed to bypass officials who were not inclined to cooperative production and management experiments (Valeš 2014: 475–476), to pacify complaints of part of the public, and, on the contrary, to acquire allies in the communist party and administrative structures, who helped approve the exceptions for direct cooperative trade with foreign firms and to introduce production based on western European methods, while helping to neutralize the work of control authorities.<sup>16</sup> The degree of constraint on state-owned enterprises on part of the state had been reduced in the attempt to introduce perestroika in Czechoslovakia, whereby the cooperative became a publicly declared model enterprise.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Act 128/2000 Coll. "On municipalities." *Public Administration Portal* [online].

<sup>13</sup> Security Services Archive (ABS), f. Object Bundles, sign. RC 26769 BR Part 2, fol. 123–4.

<sup>14</sup> ABS, f. Object Bundles, sign. RC 26769 BR Part 2 Portion 1, fol. 6–7.

<sup>15</sup> ABS, f. Object Bundles sign. RC 26769 BR Part 2, fol. 115.

<sup>16</sup> ABS, f. Object Bundles, sign. RC 26769 BR Part 2, fol. 81, 91–2.

<sup>17</sup> Czech Television Archive and Programme Funds (APF ČT), f. Telemagnetic and Digital AV Records, (František Čuba: *Slušovický zázrak*, 1999, director Robert Sedláček).

To build a high-profit cooperative in Slušovice, which, among other things, led to the urbanization of the entire village, and in general to gaining power, the management used, inter alia, symbolic connotations of its activities in a specific ideological environment. Defining themselves against a stagnant socialism had taken place not only on the field of economics, but also on the field of pop culture. We will now closely look at some of the events that made Slušovice famous.

## Horse Races

In the period of Normalization, cultural life in Slušovice was established primarily by the cultural club, administered under the MNV<sup>18</sup> and by the cultural department of the JZD, which acquired the name Agropublik in 1986. The involvement of cooperative authorities in public events was not just a symbolic ideological gesture, but because of the financial and material possibilities offered by the cooperative society, it was an absolutely necessary and desirable step. The fact that farms have a greater potential to form a community than local governments is indicated by the goals of many political delegations that were not focused on the MNV, but on the administrative building of the JZD. The organisers from these institutions were often very passive, generally for fear of not meeting the ideological expectations of the authorities<sup>19</sup>, but also due to the image of exemplary behaviour spread by the media that promoted family life and discouraged people from public engagement (Bren 2013: 166).<sup>20</sup> Yet the cooperation between the JZD and the MNV in Slušovice worked very well, as can be seen in their activities; thanks to them, horse races were held every year since 1981 – which came to be the biggest sports, cultural, and especially trade event of the time, not only for the municipality.<sup>21</sup> Its fame is proved in the article from the local weekly, *Naše cesta*, that describes a record audience

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<sup>18</sup> An association of people or groups of people who organise cultural events under the auspices of MNV in their free time.

<sup>19</sup> Each planned event was permitted, among others, depending on information from the Regional National Committee (KNV) seminars about inconvenient and suspicious participants, or from meetings with the Secretary of the District National Committee (ONV) ideological department. In case of non-compliance with the ideological framework, organizers faced the threat of oppression affecting their studies or work (see Houda 2014: 201–202).

<sup>20</sup> Yet it also has to be mentioned that social organizations were forced to hold social events because their activity was evaluated (see Houda 2014: 188).

<sup>21</sup> Václav Průcha (2009: 758) states these were the most popular horse races in Czechoslovakia.



of 55,000 people during the last Sunday horse races in 1986.<sup>22</sup> In 1987, this commercial attraction included e.g. performances of the best-known singer of Czech popular music, Karel Gott, meritorious artist Václav Neckář, and Darina Rolincová, a famous singer for children successful in the music charts, as is announced in the article *Karel Gott Visiting Us*.<sup>23</sup>

Since such important guests were not exceptional at these events, it raises the questions of what was the aim of the organisers and how the local citizens perceived the events. The literature of the time indicates that horse races (as well as car races held by the municipality) were events meant for farmers.<sup>24</sup> Local farmers did not present themselves as farmers during the events, as can be seen from the interviews.<sup>25</sup> Most of them participated but very often as organisers ("*I decided to come to help at the bar; we drew beer and earned a lot of money*" /Mr. Pavel/) or as consumers of fun, food, and household articles. An article from 1984 shows it was necessary to marginalize the significance of stalls. The article concludes: "*the large audience in the rainy weather confirms that people have not come only for the shopping and attractions.*"<sup>26</sup> The author underlines the attractiveness of the horse races, while suggesting the dominant role of consumerism. In fact, it can be said that it was the shopping and attractions that motivated people to come in large numbers to the racecourse even when it was raining.

A minority of people wanted to escape the village before the event started since during the "festivities", it was allegedly no longer possible.<sup>27</sup> While "festivals of farmers" were held in traditional village culture, new village culture introduced "festivals for farmers". Famous horses and professional artists performed there for a fee, however, they are left forgotten in the memory of informants in favour of the market stalls that formed the real village culture

<sup>22</sup> *Naše cesta*, Slušovice: JZD AK Slušovice, 1986, 8 (77).

<sup>23</sup> *Naše cesta*, Slušovice: JZD AK Slušovice, 1987, 9 (36).

<sup>24</sup> "*Horse racing and auto racing are the closest disciplines to farmers, that's why the JZD social authorities pay attention to them. Horse races understood as a festival for farmers gained the popularity of tens of thousands of visitors*" (Hurt 1985: 259).

<sup>25</sup> Approximately 12 hours of interviews were recorded in 2014 as a part of the thesis. Personal interviews were conducted by the author; the names of informants were fictionalised with their consent.

<sup>26</sup> *Naše cesta*, Slušovice: JZD Slušovice: 1984, 6 (49).

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Mr. Pavel; the situation is also captured in historical photos documenting the surrounding meadows full of cars. SOKA Zlín, f. MNV Slušovice, number of increment (no. incr.). 75/07, fol. 93.

of Slušovice.<sup>28</sup> After all, the stalls around the racecourse were not built just by coincidence; it could be seen from the range of offered goods how much the organizers wanted to attract spectators. Scarce goods – chips, enamel pots, toilet paper, tangerines and bananas in the summer – lured people and increased the attractiveness of Slušovice, because it provided better services than towns. In this case, the apparent motivation of the host – to make a profit – met with the commercial interests of the performers and the consumer needs of the spectators.

The aforementioned facts show that these events held repeatedly 5–6 times a year in Slušovice in the 1980s were far from traditional folk culture. They were not very likely to concern human relationships toward animals, as Gottlieb and Lapka describe, nor was the village represented here through a faith in transcendental powers, let alone by efforts in preserving awareness of traditional rural culture that should be more important for a village than a momentary economic profit. On the contrary, the aristocratic motif of horse competitions is used here, which covers the whole event in an attractive robe embellished by music performances based on the typical mass popular culture of the time, and it suggests the symbolic divergence of Slušovice cultural events from the officially proclaimed socialist values, which should avoid emphasizing the richness of individual businesses.

### Discos in the “Barrel”

Large attendance in Slušovice was also reflected in period magazines. These are the words of the MNV director: “*The number of visitors in Slušovice has been increasing over the last years. Slušovice has made its presence known in the public awareness as a place where everything is the best. Not considering the so-called tourists who come for the exchanges, the situation was very good.*”<sup>29</sup> *Naše cesta* also published an article called *Modern Mecca* from the south-Moravian newspaper *Rovnost*, which reads: “*The great boom of JZD*

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<sup>28</sup> The atmosphere is described in the memorable experience of one witness: “*At eight o’clock in the morning, the stalls opened, the races started at two o’clock, and when I went to the racecourse, everyone was leaving with boxes of chickens. Ninety percent of people left without even seeing a horse.*” (Mr. Kamil).

<sup>29</sup> The so-called exchanges (“burzy”) were purely shopping events, no longer covered by any cultural event; again with participation numbers amounting to tens of thousands of people. See *Naše cesta*, Slušovice: JZD AK Slušovice, 1989, 11 (43).

*AK Slušovice made this village and its surroundings a destination for so many tours and excursions, that the attendance figures may dare to compete with many historical and national sites.*"<sup>30</sup>

Apart from the aforementioned organised activities, discos were also very popular; they took place almost every Sunday and Saturday in the Derby Centre in the late 1980s.<sup>31</sup> Slušovice discos were well-known, as proven by the memories of large numbers of taxis, providing transport to Slušovice for visitors from Zlín, the district administration town at the time, located 12 kilometres away.<sup>32</sup> It was probably not just a coincidence that Slušovice discos took place in the periphery of the municipality. This enabled lower social control on part of the municipal authorities, and consequently it provided space for a different kind of social control based on different principles that were applied by the community of disco participants.

Newspapers do not give information about participants' impressions, but rather present the authorities' perspective, showing that discos were described as an essentially negative phenomenon. For example, the article *Nobody Minds* reports that "young people released their energy after the disco on the tables and chairs prepared for the horse races. Where did they leave their good manners?"<sup>33</sup> Both the name and the content of the article appeal to parents and the general public in the municipality, who were reportedly indifferent to this "vice". The 1987 article, *External Meeting of the District Commission for the Protection of Public Order*, illustrates that traditional social control in municipalities was not applicable at the discos; the article states that "critical remarks were directed at the organisational service and controls during the discos. This situation must be instantly rectified and must include the adoption of stricter financial penalties."<sup>34</sup>

These events with recorded music represent a kind of popular culture that also comprises the collective elements of local culture. Discos demonstrated a loss of relationship toward authentic songs and dances, yet they constituted

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, 1989, 11 (30).

<sup>31</sup> The imposing Derby Centre located by the racecourse and the object inside – reminiscent of a barrel that gave the building its popular name – were built in 1982–1983 by the construction cooperative JZD Slušovice based on plans of the architect Šebestián Zelina, who allegedly found inspiration for this building in Austria. Interview with Mr. Pavel; "Šebestián Zelina", *Architecture Zlín* [online].

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Mr. Martin.

<sup>33</sup> *Slušovický zpravodaj*, Slušovice: MNV Slušovice, 1987 (4, October).

<sup>34</sup> *Naše cesta*, 1987, 9 (15).

a community with its own order that required following the rules during musical events. This “degraded” type of entertainment with its loud music, aggressive lighting, and the presented music genres in particular focused only on a specifically modern popular culture – youth culture – contrary to “village parties” following liturgical traditions, that were open to more ages, yet were more limited locally. According to the sources, discos and parties mainly had in common the consumption of alcohol (Houda 2014: 200).

The attributes of urban culture are considered to be individualism and competitiveness of the participants, as stated above; discos, however, do not match this characteristic. On the other hand, this community depends on phenomena (music genres, recorded music) that originated in the urban lifestyle, and we cannot find any deeper message here.<sup>35</sup> Despite the authentic experience of dancing, discos are an illustration of a modern consumer lifestyle. In this sense, this hybrid culture is therefore not an alternative to traditional folk culture.

### **“Let’s Go On” from Slušovice**

The last analysed attraction is the TV programme called *Let’s Go On*, broadcasted by the only state TV channel in 1988.<sup>36</sup> This contest was a follow-up to the programme *Two from One Town*, where employees of two state companies in one town competed together with singers.<sup>37</sup> This game show was one of the rare programmes broadcasted live; it had the same director and presenters, but its form changed so that it could be also applied in smaller towns, where two state companies were not located. The team of employees of the local company competed against the team called *Revue*, which consisted mainly of singers of the official culture. Broadcasting from Slušovice was unique, as it was the first time that a TV crew came to a village. Participating in the competition gave JZD Slušovice wide publicity, and the unusual programme choreography in the open space of the mountainous area in the Vizovice Highlands suggests a lot about the presentation of Slušovice. The repeating motifs of action and comments by

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<sup>35</sup> The most significant meaning of discotheque hall in Slušovice and discotheque generally was an imitation of a luxurious Western lifestyle associated with drinking Coca-Cola and other foreign drinks, highlighting the hairstyle and wearing jeans.

<sup>36</sup> APF ČT, f. Telemagnetic and Digital AV Records (Jedeme dál Slušovice, 1988, director Viktor Polesný).

<sup>37</sup> SOKA Zlín, f. MNV Slušovice, no. incr. 22/07.

the script writer himself (“*most songs are written specifically to fit the theme*”) imply that the arrangement of the programme was not done randomly.<sup>38</sup>

The programme was broadcasted from the area in front of Hotel Slušovice<sup>39</sup>, in the recreational compound built by the collective farm.<sup>40</sup> The introduction of both competing and non-competing participants and of singers was combined with folk and country styles. All singers arrived in wagons pulled by horses, accompanied by the sound of folk songs about horses and a brass band, dressed in horse racing gear, sometimes with cowboy hats. By contrast, the local cooperative introduced themselves in racing cars, referring to the successful Agroteam JZD Slušovice<sup>41</sup> and to the material growth that Slušovice had achieved through socialization of the countryside.

When looking at the professional profile of the local team, you do not have the impression of watching a village team, either. In fact, members of the Slušovice team are introduced as representatives of the “modern field of biotechnologies”, as the multiple national champion and a participant in the Monte Carlo Rally, the operational director of Agro, an editor of the Agropublik company, a livestock specialist, and a secretary, which all generally indicate “non-rural” professions. Competitions are focused on different business areas of JZD Slušovice. Apart from the competing teams, Agroteam JZD Slušovice is also presented, trying to beat the record in changing car tyres. Other participants include a young jockey on a pony that again refers to the racing stable JZD Slušovice, and selected football players of TJ JZD Slušovice team, who take penalty kicks against players of Sparta Prague, which was the best football team in Czechoslovakia at the time. During the programme, music bands and folk troupes from the region are shown, however, these are not introduced by presenters.

The comments of the two presenters underline especially the material welfare of Slušovice. While showing the prize for the winner, the camera focuses on the prepared car. The presenter responds: “*Oh yeah, Slušovice, that prize*

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<sup>38</sup> SOKA Zlín, f. MNV Slušovice, no. incr. 75/07, fol. 70.

<sup>39</sup> The construction of the hotel at the site called Compound of Health in Všemina – situated in the proximity of both the JZD and MNV Slušovice – started in 1984; the luxurious compound with tennis courts, a swimming pool, and massage rooms was completed two years later. See *Naše cesta*, 1984, 6 (41); Hurt (1985).

<sup>40</sup> *Naše cesta*, 1987, 9 (33); *Naše cesta*, 1988, 10 (45).

<sup>41</sup> Leo Pavlík, Slušovice racing driver, was a five-time national champion. See “Legends of Domažlice”, *Domažlice Daily Newspaper* [online].

is quite appropriate,”<sup>42</sup> he alludes to the tremendous financial potential of the agricultural facility in Slušovice. When a pump is destroyed during a contest in inflating tyres, the presenter comments it as follows: “*We have a spare one, since we’re in Slušovice.*” A third example of stressing the modernization of Slušovice in the TV popular culture is offered during the penalties that are introduced with these words: “*Tonight, two major football teams are going to play each other, the local Slušovice team is up against the new league champion, Sparta Prague. [...] I believe it will not take long until these two teams meet in the final of the Czech Cup.*” Many people certainly believed that football players from Slušovice would move up to the first league, and thus score a triumph in this field as well.<sup>43</sup>

Folk culture as a symbol of the traditional country is only covered in the programme in the symbolic welcome with bread and salt and in the Moravian folk costumes in which musicians of the invited brass band are dressed, as well as the female presenter during first minutes of the show. The folk motif appears again after the final results of the competition, again as folk songs with cimbalom music, with interwoven teams singing and dancing together, demonstrating a parody of a folk festival. The most visible instrument of folk music shown in the programme is a cimbalom, not by itself yet, only as the accompaniment of rock and country music.

Rural culture was represented more by the western country style than by traditional local folklore, which illustrates its transformation as a result of influences from abroad. The recurrent motif of horses and western clothes refers to this fact, but also does the country music repeatedly performed by a children’s folklore club, among others. This way, country style in the countryside partially filled the empty space left by traditional folk music (see Huakanes 2004: 108), which lost its importance in the 1950s by being linked to communist ideology (Houda 2014: 13–14, Karásek 1949). Country music in the programme also shows the decline of collective dances that were typical for folk culture. While the aforementioned interwoven dancing teams create the impression of a mocking imitation of a folk festivity, the only serious collective dancing is performed

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<sup>42</sup> At the end, the car brings in the real main prize – a silver cup for the winner, yet it has fulfilled its prestigious role.

<sup>43</sup> TJ JZD Slušovice played in the 6<sup>th</sup> national football league in the season 1978/1979, yet they started the season 1986/1987 up in the second national league. The image of Slušovice as a prosperous place was therefore established also through football as a means of popular culture. See *Naše cesta*, 1986, 8 (62).

by children, which shows a drop of traditional folk culture features to the world of children, and thus points to their degradation.

Nevertheless, thousands of spectators respond to the show composition with frequent rounds of applause and with laughter, i.e. through positive responses. Despite the fact that cameras occasionally captured some noise from the audience, it seems that most people had indeed come to listen to the popular music stars, as they sing their songs with them. This proves the success of this genre, which managed to appeal to the masses just as the state government imagined, and it also showed Slušovice as a municipality capable of handling crowds of people (Houda 2014: 53).<sup>44</sup>

The modernised country is shown to the TV spectator with Slušovice serving as a perfect example, which is also suggested in a period newspaper by one of the performing singers.<sup>45</sup> Slušovice is introduced with its elements of modern architecture, modern agriculture, industry, infrastructure, as well as curiosities, such as a big boat on the Všemina dam and a discarded plane serving as a restaurant adjacent to the racecourse since 1982.<sup>46</sup> Slušovice thus became a typical example of a modernised village that fulfils the expectations of the regime about the socialist countryside, while simultaneously absorbing urban and even Western popular culture. Thus, it creates a specific kind of hybrid rural-urban and socialist-consumer popular culture.

## Conclusion

The range of activities of the Slušovice agricultural facility was so extensive that it clearly set the pace of the municipality development. A four-lane road ending provisionally in the town centre suggests the alleged plans to rebuild the municipality and transform it to an exemplary villa town.<sup>47</sup> Yet none of this was completed, and many of the rebuilt parts are no longer in existence, either. This illustrates how the structures of the JZD and the local community were interconnected in the state socialist regime. After the collapse of collective farming, nothing else could integrate the inhabitants as much to work for a common

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<sup>44</sup> *Melodie*, Praha: Orbis, 1976, 14 (3).

<sup>45</sup> "Slušovice was not chosen by accident for this show. Everybody is wondering whether their collective farmers are really able to do all that." SOkA Zlín, f. MNV Slušovice, no. incr. 75/07, fol. 70.

<sup>46</sup> SOkA Zlín, f. JZD AK Slušovice, Inventory, pp. 10.

<sup>47</sup> APF ČT, f. Telemagnetic and Digital AV Records (Příběh slušovického letadla, 1998, director Robert Sedláček); Interview with Mr. Martin.

goal. Slušovice, with its huge expansion and decline<sup>48</sup>, clearly demonstrated the transformation of activities in the country, and thus the notion of the socialist village as one of many parts of the collective farm, whose function was to provide space for its operation.

Collective farms played one of the roles in collectivisation in the 1980s – as the main employer in the municipality, they served as an integration centre, and after destroying traditional social life in the country, they helped to establish a new collective ethos. Urban popular culture in Slušovice and its hybridisation with rural content then made space for active community life, and thus contributed to the success and the development of the local community.

The popular culture shown in the analysed cases reflects many trends. These are mainly the transformation of lifestyle (shopping, horse races, discos), the modernization of the country (housing estates, multi-lane roads), and the prosperous JZD (the constructor and operator of all of the venues where events were organised). Popular culture demonstrates the classic image of the Czech country (hospitality with bread and salt, folk costumes, horses), however, it does not constitute the full tradition.<sup>49</sup> Apart from the old country, it also represents a new country culture (the modern equipment of JZD, car racing, but also alcohol drinking by minors, as stated above).

Despite Slušovice being located in the country, rural culture is presented here only in a geographical and a community sense. We can see quite a small municipality with its population gathered around the local JZD (they visit and organise its events). By the numbers of people attending the events, the municipality is easily comparable to bigger towns; its material welfare is also significant with its curious buildings, of the opportunities for comfortable consumerism and for leisure activities – which are elements of an urban lifestyle. From the tradition-modernity perspective, the municipality experiences contemporary popular culture with a progressive future vision. We do not learn anything about a desire for tradition, respect towards ancestors or animal care; on the contrary, we can see the inspiration from the West in country music, admiring TV idols, horse race betting, and using animals in a TV show. The notion of social control is transforming as well, since the main role moves from the traditional authorities to the heads of cultural (discos) and working (JZD) groups. There is still

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<sup>48</sup> From autumn 1989 to summer 1991, 101 joint-stock companies were established, acquiring the assets of the former collective farm. SOKA Zlín, f. JZD AK Slušovice, Inventory, pp. 10.

<sup>49</sup> The “Czech tradition of deliberate forgetting” was present not only in the period of Normalization, its features can also be found in the interwar period and after November 1989.



a need to remember the fact that the aforementioned characters of new culture did not appear in Slušovice under the influence of an ordinary urbanisation process, but as the result of local prosperity shaped by the presence of state ideological authorities.

Activities in the country no longer reflect regional historical elements; if the script writer of a contest programme wants the performance of folk troupes in the country, they have to come from more distant areas. Events do not embody any deeper meaning, as we might expect in traditional rural culture. This transformation is illustrated by the fact that organisers want a show for the audience; they wish to attract as many people as possible, from towns, as well, and these visitors mainly look for entertainment. The loss of the authentic relationship towards songs and collective dances, a mocking parody of a folk festivity, and the transition from the festivities of farmers to festivities for farmers all demonstrate that traditional folk culture has become an exotic past.

The aforementioned facts prove that popular culture did not only reflect the modernization of the country, it also played a direct constructive role in this process, since it offered the opportunity for the municipality and businesses to present themselves on a prestigious level. The censored media that provided access to culture in the country, carrying with it the possibility to partially manipulate the public, created the image of Slušovice as a municipality with an urban lifestyle and with the ability to manage large numbers of people; and by calling it the "Slušovice miracle", it brought fame to the municipality. The media also underlined the integration potential of the population participating in popular activities, which contributed to the success of Slušovice. Last, but not least, it offered the potential of economic profit, which intensified the urban consumer lifestyle and wealth of the villagers even more.

As Slušovice was included in the competition for smaller towns, it organised horse races with the highest attendance figures and one of the few disco nightclubs in the environs, and thus, popular culture gave the spectators and participants the impression that Slušovice was *de facto* a town, and it contributed to the assumption that later on, ironically in the period with no more mass events, when attractive buildings disappeared and trials with the heads of the former collective farm took place, Slušovice finally became a town *de iure*. Slušovice therefore offers an unusually striking example of the rural-urban culture mix.

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