

THE PROJECT ZLÍN

Everyday life in a materialized utopia

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Abstract: *This article is based on a contribution to the “Město – mýtus – identita” (City – Myth – Identity) conference. In it we attempt to consider Baťa and Zlín as a specific kind of myth which is still alive within our cultural milieu. In the text which follows we will deal with one chapter from the overall story of Zlín: with the forms of worker housing, the original assumptions around its construction and its life in everyday currency (based on in-depth interviews with the residents). With this analytical look at this unique phenomenon we wish to peer under one layer of the Zlín myth.*

Keywords: *Zlín, Baťa, modernity, myth, ideology, utopia, housing, family house.*

The Zlín of the Baťa² family is without doubt one of the most interesting projects to have occurred in the modern history of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic and also had considerable significance abroad.³ It was built during the First Republic as a model town – it reflected contemporary thinking on the business ethos and quality of life which a modern town and its hinterland should provide. From the perspective of today’s social science researcher Zlín is therefore from one point of view a kind of “preserve” of modernity: the purpose behind the construction of the town and its buildings is well known

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² Tomáš Baťa was the founder of the Bata Shoes Company, born in Zlín in 1876, died in a plain crash near Zlín in 1932. His half-brother Jan Antonín Baťa became the head of the company after his death. During the Second World War Jan Antonín left Czechoslovakia and settled down in Brazil. After the war he was indicted as a collaborationist, however in 2007 was acquitted. He died in Brazil in 1965.

³ We would like to kindly thank Stuart Roberts for the translation of this text.

and researchable. This “preservation” can serve as good comparative material for researching everyday life in the Zlín of today, which on the one hand refers frequently and with pride to its past, but on the other hand is trying, more or less successfully, to escape from the stereotype of an industrial town.

The second reason why we take Zlín to be a suitable environment for the study of these changes is the particular form of housing which Baťa provided for his employees. Family housing in Zlín, and then later in other towns, was provided in the form of standardized family houses. By historical coincidence it turned out that these houses, originally conceived as temporary dwellings to be replaced after thirty years or so to meet new living standards, continue to serve their inhabitants to the present day. The inhabitants of these standardized houses designed seventy years ago, with a view to the fastest possible construction and lowest level of costs, as minimal housing (a very topical issue in its day), are today “dealing” with these building techniques in seeking to achieve their own ideas of quality modern living. In these dealings are reflected the needs of individuals and families, shaped by a modern lifestyle, with its typical individualization and rhythm (influenced by technological progress and the diversity of social life), which is very different from the day-to-day habits of their grandparents’ generation. So while in the first part we deal with the initial circumstances and starting point of these family houses, in the second we are concerned mainly with the topic of the *individualization of historical standardized housing by its present users*. In other words we are asking how the inhabitants of these typified housing developments are rebuilding them and what is their reasoning? In what directions are the inhabitants developing their homes while the basic inner dispositions and technologies of the houses are almost the same? How does the Baťa house function at the present time?

The myth of Zlín

Present-day Zlín came into being as a project on which leading architects and urbanists⁴ worked and which was dictated by the interests and aims of the Baťa company. The plans of the town as a whole and the design and building techniques of the individual buildings reflected the Baťa work and life ethos and philosophy. The rapidity with which the town grew, together with its business success, which allowed the company to expand throughout the world,

⁴ We should mention at the very least Jan Kotěra, František Lydie Gahura and Vladimír Karlík.

supported the growth of the significant myth of First Czechoslovak Republic which “Baťa Zlín” undoubtedly was and is. In this context, let us mention the Barthian myth, which has its own characteristics. In this sense a myth is a speech which “has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us.” (Barthes in SONTAG 2000: 102)⁵. Myth is an instrument of naturalization of our social world. It legitimizes social inequalities and status quo. It is not a speech which speaks about reality directly. Its aim is not to capture reality objectively. The main characteristic of myth is that it “deforms” (ibid: 108) – it highlights some elements and suppresses others, but it covers nothing up and hides nothing. The myth of “Baťa Zlín” tells of the hard work, decency and appropriateness of the capitalist democratic system, of the figure of a decent entrepreneur and of the moral significance of labor. It positively does not hide the fact that the main policy aim of the company was profit, the development of a loyal workforce⁶ and the overall disciplining of the town and its inhabitants. Of course the ethics of the capitalist method of manufacture is an alibi for disciplining. From the point of view of the myth it is not important who Baťa *really* was, how the people employed in his company *really* lived, and what were the *real* motives for his activities. On the contrary, Baťa’s fate and the history of its enterprise became a symbol of the prosperity and success of interwar Czechoslovakia.

The totalitarian act of renaming the town confirms the strength of this *speech on success*: for 40 years (from 1949 till 1990) Zlín became Gottwaldov. The town, whose name was linked to the success of the young Czechoslovakia, was changed into a town whose name was meant to remind people of the new, communist Czechoslovakia. For this reason also the originally value-neutral name of Zlín, which gained its connotations through historical events, had to be replaced with the clear, unambiguous “Gottwaldov.” The myth about capitalist success was to be replaced by a myth about a president from the working class⁷.

⁵ In his interpretation of myth Barthes refers to the concept of sign – the signifier – the signified (Barthes 2004). By analogy it creates a second (metalinguistic) level of significance for its own mythical discourse: signification – form – concept. In our case the form is Baťa Zlín and its history, the concept is the economic success and way of life which the factory, around which the town formed, represents.

⁶ In respect of the Zlín concept Novák speaks thus of worker housing: “A no less important fact which supported further efforts to secure better housing for the workers was that a satisfied worker who values the boss’s efforts to provide him with a better living standard is more restrained in his desire for social reform.” (NOVÁK 2008: 260)

⁷ Klement Gottwald (1896–1953) was a politician, leader of The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. After the February coup d’état he was elected the first communist President of Czechoslovakia.

The Zlín utopia

There is often talk of utopia in relation to the town of Zlín.⁸ Even we have not avoided this designation in the title of this section. But we speak deliberately of a materialized utopia, by means of which we want to capture an important dimension of the whole Zlín undertaking, and that is the successful (albeit short-lived) attempt to achieve it. We can characterize utopia as a knowledge⁹ type through its attempt to know society, understand its functioning as a unit and in particular in its attempt to propose an ideal form of social organization. A further sign is that in some of their forms utopias assume that the social life of society can be influenced by the material form of its environment. In other words an ideal society needs an ideal town. And finally, utopian knowledge to a large extent is emancipatory – it aspires to change society in the sense of improving its shortcomings. Nor was Bafa a stranger to all of this.

On the other hand one must realize that to talk of Zlín as a utopia is problematic. If we refer to Mannheim's concept of utopia, we cannot avoid the duality of utopia and ideology, which is key to understanding these types of knowledge. Put simply, Mannheim (1991) characterizes utopian consciousness as typical of that social group which has an interest in a change in the status quo of society, and by contrast ideology as the consciousness of the group which is satisfied with the current social arrangements.¹⁰ A myth in Roland Barthes' conception is an ideological speech, not a utopian one. Without doubt Bafa tried to change the social reality and living conditions of his factory workers, but on the other hand he did not stand up against the underlying social order, indeed quite the opposite. This is the paradox which encounters anyone who attempts to achieve his plans for an ideal society. This is also analyzed by David Harvey (2000) in his book *Spaces of Hope*, in which he devotes one chapter to an analysis of various kinds of utopian consciousness and to attempts

His era is known as the time of Stalinism, political persecutions and encroachment on the democracy and freedom.

⁸ For example the work by A. Steinführer *Stadt und Utopie: Das Experiment Zlín 1920–1938* (STEINFÜHRER 2002). Another example is the *Utopie moderny: Zlín (Utopia of Modernity: Zlín)* symposium which took place in Zlín in 2009.

⁹ Karl Mannheim speaks of utopia as a characteristic form of knowledge and we understand it in the same way (MANNHEIM 1991).

¹⁰ By their nature these types of knowledge are value-based and cannot be objective: while utopians are unable to evaluate anything in social reality positively, ideologues are unable to perceive their defects, which would disturb their distorted picture.

to achieve utopia. In order for visions of society to be successfully achieved, many compromises are necessary which result from clashes with the everyday practice of social reality. The result of this is the “materializations of spatial utopias” (Harvey 2000: 164) which often lose much of their original emancipatory potential. The second paradox comes from the basis of Mannheim’s concept: by being achieved the utopian nature of knowledge is lost, because the aim has been realized. By contrast it can happen that original utopian thoughts become ideological, as victims of historical changes and the social context in which they occur. In the end Baťa’s actions must be considered more ideological. At the same time this ideology was supported by emergent speech, which we have called the *Zlín myth*.

Of course it must be admitted that Baťa and his company supported the discourse of utopia or more precisely the newly established ideal town. We can track this support at the level of practice and developed theory. As far as practice is concerned, it is clear that Baťa and his construction department built an entirely new town. The clearing of whole blocks of flats and streets in the original historic centre of old Zlín was accompanied by slogans on the walls declaring *We are building a new Zlín, Demolishing the old century*, while an entirely new town centre began to be built, focussed on the main entrance to the factory and conceived as a large square with the characteristic name “Labor Square.” The factory became a (non-public) town centre. At the same time developments of model houses grew up for worker housing and of more sumptuous houses for managers of the town and the factory, all linked by the concept of a garden city.¹¹

The employees and associates in the design and construction departments of the Baťa company (architects Gahura, Gočár, Voženílek and others) were concerned at the theoretical level with the concept of an industrial town. They were led to this particularly by requirements arising from the development and construction of the company’s satellite towns. Novák (2008) mentions that in 1937 a three-volume publication, never published, was ready for print, entitled *The Ideal Industrial Town of the Future*. During this work there arose in the Zlín studios several designs for an ideal town, of which the best known is probably Gočár’s design for an *Ideal Industrial Town for 10 000 inhabitants*.

¹¹ One should not forget that Howard’s original idea for a Garden City had within it very strong emancipatory potential: his primary concern was to improve the living conditions of workers and their families. (e.g. HOWARD 1902)

The family house and the family in Baťa Zlín

In these concepts of the ideal town and in the actual construction great emphasis was placed on the shape of housing for company employees¹². This emphasis was linked to the significance which Baťa placed on family life. For him the family functioned as a metaphor for a good working collective in the workshop (with the workshop boss as head of this close-knit working family). Architect Gahura recalled Baťa's creed like this: "An industrial worker is a servant when at work, so he needs the kind of private life where he can feel that he is king of his own castle." (Gahura 1944 in HORŇÁKOVÁ 2006: 35). This was a matter of securing for factory workers the best possible living conditions and quiet surroundings for family life; among other reasons, because a satisfied employee is a good employee. It was to this requirement that the kind of family housing and the conceptual internal layout and connection to the garden were directed. Baťa and his associates regarded a family house as the only suitable form of accommodation for a working family, guaranteeing an appropriate standard of living: "Everyone, if he does not live in a large city, should have a house to provide healthy living conditions, in accordance with today's living standards. This should be a house which can be built based on his annual income. At the moment we build houses to last 500 years which have throttled and suffocated future generations in the same way that houses built by our ancestors suffocate us. It is natural that a house built to last 500 years costs so much that a person could not earn enough in even over 20 years. And that is why the greater part of the nation lives out its best years, and the time when they are raising their children, living in hovels." (BAŤA: 1990: 113; speech dated 1931). This condition was met by the highest levels of standardization and rationalization when building the housing developments. There is of course no doubt that in quality terms the Baťa housing exceeded manifold the experience of his workers with other forms of their present housing.

A house was of course to be above all a place where a company employee would have the chance to recuperate and relax. This relaxation was linked to the so-called traditional view of the family, where the woman was a housewife and took care of the household and children, with responsibility for their private living space. The schoolgirls in his schools and unmarried workers in the factory were considered by Baťa mainly as future wives of his employees:

¹² Emphasis on the form of housing is key in classical utopias.

“But the upbringing of girls will follow a different course [from that of boys]. We must improve our cooking schools, since that is a science, the knowledge of which supports good health, while ignorance of it is damaging. We must give them greater opportunities to learn to sew clothing, to raise children, to manage a household. So far men cannot even imagine how far a reasonable and feminine housewifely spirit can contribute, to the point that women with their creative thinking are a complement to their men in good housekeeping. They should become the most sought-after wives for our young men for their practical education, for their moral sense, as well as for their social skills, and of course for their financial worth.” (BAŤA 1990: 56). The role of women in the Baťa system was above all to create a suitable home environment. The equipment of a house was to provide suitable help in this endeavor. One of the main creators of the whole Zlín housing concept, the architect Gahura, put it this way when considering the future of housing: “The rationalization of domestic economy and complete equipping of the house with (labor-saving) aids will allow women to devote themselves more to their children and their other duties and to enrich their lives with ethical and aesthetic values. The use of free time for their own acquisition of such values. This is an economic, social and cultural prerequisite.” (Gahura 1933 in HORŇÁKOVÁ 2006: 9–11). As the Swedish anthropologist Orvar Löfgren points out, this moral appeal calling for the opposition of the “rational and disciplined male operating in the public sphere” and “a loving wife and supportive home” was the basis for a (bourgeois) ideology of values of working life and the idea itself was driven by the effort to discipline the potentially dangerous working masses: “If only the working classes could be domesticated, if only their unrest and ambitions could be turned inwards, towards the home and family, many problems would be solved.” (LÖFGREN 2007: 149)

So all Baťa houses were equipped with modern kitchens (with a sink and draining board, built-in cupboards, stove and worktop) and bathrooms (enamel bath, sink, tiled heating stove, toilet), living room (at least 15 square meters) and at least one bedroom with a built-in wardrobe (at least 13 square meters for parents, at least 11 square meters for children). They were not standardized just from the point of view of materials and construction techniques, but also in terms of their internal fittings. Musil (2003: 202–203) includes the following minimum requirements to be met by each house:

“Layout requirements: Usable area of the dwelling to be at least 80 square meters; two floors above ground, the upper floor serving only for sleeping



4-apartment house.

accommodation; [...] kitchen min. 6 square meters, with access from the corridor; bathroom, WC and larder of minimum size; in the basement a laundry, drying area for fuel; semi-detached houses with three rooms; entrances in semi-detached houses to be on opposite sides; detached houses with four or five rooms, with possibly a garage and terrace.” It is clear from this that the social structure of town society was already reflected in the planned construction (“detached houses for senior managers”). At the same time there is emphasis on the need for individual private housing, for absolute privacy (“entrances in semi-detached houses to be on opposite sides”). It is exactly for this reason that the semi-detached house was chosen as the ideal type of housing. Gahura explained this choice in these words: “The choice was made of a house with two apartments, which allowed individual independent access to the apartments and had its own small garden, accessed by its own path directly from the street. This was to allow completely independent surrounds for the garden and the house, to be used in full only by one family. This kind of semi-detached house acknowledged the right of the employee to free individual development not only of a family life, but also of the employee’s own personality.” (Gahura 1944 in HORŇÁKOVÁ 2006: 35). For the same reason a semi-detached house



Semi-detached house.

was conceived as housing using one half of a house: thus the families would not be living one above the other. On the contrary their status within the house was theoretically completely equal.

An integral part of Baťa housing was a garden. Originally the gardens were intended as agricultural plots for those inhabitants who came mainly from the countryside and were used to farm work. But with the growth of the factory this idea soon foundered: First, building had to be condensed in order to meet the demand for housing, and there was insufficient space for gardens used in this way. Secondly, it was shown that in the concept of a house as a space for recuperation, it was appropriate to use the garden only for relaxation. The gardens were maintained by the municipality, which was responsible for their upkeep and appearance, any form of subsistence farming (growing vegetables or keeping small animals) was not permitted. Over time three basic house types developed in Zlín for workers at the factory. The first two of these (semi-detached and four-apartment houses) can be designated blue-collar housing, detached houses as mentioned earlier were allocated to management employees, to the families of the doctors at the Baťa hospital and so on. The 4-apartment houses, as the name implies, are houses with four apartments,

with a bathroom, small kitchen and a living room on the ground floor and one larger or two smaller bedrooms on the first floor. Semi-detached houses (two apartments in one house) have basically the same layout, with the rooms being somewhat more spacious.

Research history and methods used

From a methodological point of view our research was in part inspired by the so-called “Show us your home” approach developed by Jane M Jacobs’ team for a project researching life in high-rise blocks in Glasgow’s Red Road (the *Highrise Project*).¹³ This approach is based on the direct contextualization of an interview (in Jacobs’ case using a video recording) in the location the interviewees are discussing. “‘Show us your home’ (SUYH) is a method of gathering information about people in, and in action with, their homes. It works as a data-gathering method in conjunction with standard format interviews but it was adopted as a way of rupturing the relatively static framing of the interview. Basically, the provisional notion was to think about asking residents to show us their homes as a mechanism for activating the socio-materiality of the home, the lived event of the home.” (JACOBS, CAIRNS, STREBEL 2008). Our research used a voice recorder and documentary photographs. The “static” part of the interview took place in one of the rooms which the interviewees considered suitable for this kind of “event.” A further, “dynamic” part then took place as a tour of the house, its different rooms or spaces, a description of everyday activities which occur in them and their rough distribution in time, the people who use them and most of all, commentary on changes they have already made or are planning to make. It is an epistemological difficulty of research set up in this way that we capture practices using narratives about them – narratives which are always selective or partial, but they allow us “to get closer to people’s lived experience” (MILLER and GLASSNER 1997: 103) using the technique of the open-ended interview. Therefore only the outline structure of the interview was set out in advance, the thematic areas coming from the definition of the underlying phenomenon: the individualization of historical standardized housing by its current occupants, to which the research is addressed and also to the interdisciplinarity which stood at the start of the research (the two interviewers are sociologists, the research was initiated by an architect). In our

¹³ See the project website: <http://www.ace.ed.ac.uk/highrise/>.

opinion this form of research enables active participation of the interviewee, gives him/her space to input his/her own relevant subjects (PATTON 1990). In spite of this open form of interview we kept to a few basic lines mapping the history of life in the building, based on these research questions: 1. The story of their purchase, or acquisition, of the house and their moving in. 2. The circumstances around any reconstruction or more minor changes. 3. Day-to-day practices set in specific spaces of the house and performed by members of the household. 4. The street, the neighborhood and the district. 5. The town of Zlín and the use they make of other parts of it. Particularly for the third point, placing the interview directly into the house of the interviewees once more proved of great worth. Everyday practices taking place “at home” are often “invisible,” are taken for granted.

To obtain suitable interviewees (both male and female) both personal contacts (one of the researchers currently lives in Zlín) use was therefore made of her gatekeeper position for the chosen locations and later we linked in with a technique based on the use of social networks – snowball sampling. The total number of interviews conducted in houses in the former worker districts of Zálešná, Podvesná and Letná was 10, with a further 2 detailing interviews being conducted outside.¹⁴ The research also included the study of documents and two detailed interviews with experts (on the history and present day of the town of Zlín). All interviews took place in 2008, all participants signing an Informed Consent Form.

The City Transformation

For the current occupiers of the houses the town is an important context for their narratives. They often speak of their house in connection with the street (for any changes it is of great importance how the house is situated with respect to other buildings in the surrounding area and in relation to the road), and of the town as a whole, when they compare it with other kinds of houses in other districts. For a modern functionalist town regularity, the repetition of a certain element and also the frequency which reinforced the effect of this repetition were all characteristic. We can see this both in the urbanistic plan of the town and in the rhythm of its social life, which as late as the early 1990s was phased in line with the life of the factory. As Jan Sedlák mentions, typical

¹⁴ As of 1/30./2009



Labor Square.

of the construction was “a thorough standardization and normalization, excellent organization of construction work and specialization of construction workers. With justification therefore they spoke of Zlín architecture as more like manufacturing than building” (SEDLÁK 1991: 57). The regularity of the built-up area, the lines of houses, the standardization of buildings was also the subject of criticism; on many photographs the built-up area is depicted as being organized into military lines, called a “modern flood” (see HONZÍK 1947 in SEDLÁK 1991). But as Rostislav Švácha points out, this does not fully apply to the Zlín area of family houses. Here there appear both the themes of regularity and repetition, but also a conscious breaking-up of this unity: “This disquiet model shows the continual efforts of the designers not to succumb a priori to the geometric outline, but to take account at each placement of a new building of the whole of its spatial and natural framework; these lines and individual buildings today spread out into all sorts of oblique directions. With its sympathetic irregularity it evokes the organically overgrown ground plans of villages, ancient cultural grounds and age-old towns.” (ŠVÁCHA 1995:6).

Let us however leave these birds' eye reflections on the town and look at how it appears, seen from below. Zlín was built as a town, but it was far from the atmosphere of an organically grown town, even if according to Švácha it has its organic moments in some respects. In the theory of towns we find as the main characteristic of this social space a diversity, a variety of forms, groups, individuals and their mutual relationships (see for example ŠULÉŘOVÁ 2006). The prerequisite for such an urban space is its slow growth and layering. The speed and relative homogeneity, the "integral concept of the industrial town" brought into being as a "project" also leads to questions about whether Zlín is a "town." Alena Kubová-Gauché quotes an unknown French architect who took part in a visit to Zlín in the 1930s: "Zlín is built on human will. Zlín is simple, without any kind of error. [...] Now all they have to do is to turn Zlín into a town." (KUBOVÁ-GAUCHÉ 2002: 59). Zlín was not intended to be a town of variety; it was to be a town of modernity; homogeneity and clarity of purpose were part of its myth, the narrative of the industrial town. Some aspects of the "old town" had no place in it. Rostislav Švácha designates Zlín, thanks to this selective impact of its urbanism as a town where it is possible to find the "modern without the avant-garde": "Let's try to image members of the artistic avant-garde hanging around on Zlín's Labor Square or on the open space in front of the Baťa monument. [...] In the open spaces of Baťa Zlín, where everyone is hurrying along with his clearly defined work function, that kind of night-time avant-garde waster would stick out painfully like a sore thumb." (ŠVÁCHA 1995: 6) So we can say that within itself the town connects the two most significant features of (organized) modernity (WAGNER 1994) – its myth is perforce emancipatory; it offers a vision, a future, growth (but not however in the sense of a fundamental transformation of the social order). Its second also typically modern feature is then the creation of discipline, its visibility and control.

This regularity of the town's urbanism was however conditioned by the prerequisite social organization which was tied to the rhythm of the factory. In photographs of the period we often see crowds of workers bound for or from the factory complex or resting on the lawns¹⁵. This overspill of people in the spaces of the town and beyond it was still visible at the beginning of the 1990s, not long before the factory was closed down, as is illustrated by the following reminiscence: "*Actually it isn't any more the steel city*¹⁶ *as it used to be. Me,*

¹⁵ See as an example <http://www.staryzlin.cz/>.

¹⁶ This quotation probably refer to the famous novel *The Begum's Fortune* (French original: *Les*

I was goin' to work still in '88 through a live factory that was pourin' out at 2 pm everyday, simply through the gates when you went through, so big crowds, yeah. We used to go in '91 to "Aisy," in '92 to "Aisy," ye know it's a pub in the middle of the city, it's got a terrace and 10 p.m., there's my mate, takin'-off, fireworks, so we went out to the terrace, all the folks had a glass in the hand, and it was 10 past 10 and the fireworks started and from that bus park 50 buses pulled out. Yeah 'cause it was end of shift and the buses was flooded, so you was standin' with that glass and the working class was leavin', yeah (with a smile)." He used the word *firework* to describe the atmosphere of the end of the shift, when so many people were leaving the factory. Many of the workers commuted to the factory from other cities and villages in the region, so they used public transportation to get home. Nowadays the spectacle is different.

Let us complete this view (looking at the situation once more from somewhere above, aside from the action) with two more reminiscences. Those of their initial feelings after the arriving of a fifteen-year-old boy and girl at the factory and the town from the Vysočina highland region: *"Up in Vysočina we had some freedom, the kind of chores that some of the farmers' sons had, I didn't have any of those.... When I arrived in Zlín, at that boarding school, it was a bit like military service in a way, they kept an eye on us, in the room we had that, leader, mayor or whatever they called them then, who kept an eye on us, there was lights-out at night, and there was a roll-call before lights-out and so on. On Saturdays and Sundays, on Sundays we had to go on voluntary work parties.... I got used to it in the end, but when we first arrived from our villages at the age of fifteen, we were right twits."*

In this extract from a now pensioned-off employee of Svit (*post-1948 name of Bata – Trans.*) who joined the factory just after the war, we can see the strong element of supervision, which he perceived from the position of a young future worker migrating for work from an area which at that time was dependent on agriculture. However another contemporary witness points out how strong an emancipatory charge it had for newly-arrived young people, however limiting it was: *"I really tried very hard, I wasn't going to go home. My dad had said to me, either you make a success of it there or you come home to herd the cows down to the brick factory.... I say, no I really must, I worked like a madwoman."* At another point, she makes the comment: *"We came here ... those were runaways."* The

Cinq cents millions de la Bégum). This title was published in Czech as *Steel City* and its author Jules Verne was/is very popular among young Czech readers.

Baťa myth worked on the principle of offering a future, hope and order. Within it, Zlín represented the chance of making money and a change in one's living standard, the gaining of experience; with its symbolic and economic power the factory drew hordes of migrant workers from many corners of Czechoslovakia.

However contemporary Zlín lost this magnetism as a consequence of the closure of the factory. Nowadays the city profiles itself as an administrative and university center; public life penetrates in the midst of the factory buildings and the city is a donator of huge constructions of buildings without a grain of the traditional brick aesthetics.

Contemporary reconstructions of Baťa family houses

American anthropologists Arnold and Graesch make the distinction between two kinds of investment which people make in upgrading their housing – the first is remodelling as a “complex, expensive, emotional, and fascinating process experienced by many homeowners. Major changes in home design may occur in response to family expansion or generational cycling, or perhaps major upgrades or modernization may be more closely related to ‘keeping up’ with trends and neighbors.” The second is then beautification, that “encompasses upkeep rather than structural changes and includes fresh coats of paint, new furnishings, improved landscaping, and the like. Families of different backgrounds may have very different ideas about the degree to which such investments in their homes are needed and what forms they may take” (ARNOLD and GRAESCH 2002: 1-2). For the purposes of the present work it is mainly the first motive which is important; it relates more to the interaction between people and the material environment into which have been “imprinted” the cultural and social ideas and values of its builders. Reconstruction is also a long-term process; there is always something which is “*not quite done*,” as Arnold and Graesch write, it is a process in which the builders are engaged not only financially and in terms of their time, but also emotionally; reconstruction can be seen in the context of building a home, a space for a present or planned family and its comfort: “*There are still lots of things to be finished here...It’s like that, when it starts to get going, then you’re pleased that you can take a rest from it, that’s the way with any building, you are terribly tired, with all that sorting out and dealing with problems, I was taking pills, it got on top of me... here there are supposed to be some shelves, there’s a wardrobe to go in upstairs, this door opening here is not finished yet.*”



The boundaries of the urban heritage zone in Zlín.

Source: Town of Zlín, official website.¹⁷

In all the reconstruction (or remodelling) cases mentioned in the next part of this text, the houses concerned are located in the urban heritage zone, that is, in the area where the internal layout of houses can be changed, overall construction and insulation undertaken, but only if the exterior appearance is retained. To this end standardized extensions are available and each request to reconstruct is accompanied by relatively complicated negotiations between the builder and the town.¹⁸ One important context for the realization of occupiers' ideas and the satisfaction of their needs is the formal "administrative" framework, which is formed mainly by the heritage preservation office for districts and buildings, which sets permitted dimensions and appearance for extensions, insulation options for houses and material to be used for cladding, windows, etc. So a significant player in the reconstruction process is therefore the "authorities" which in most interviews means the Town Hall, its Chief Architect's Office and the Building Department (which together with

¹⁷ Available on http://www.zlin.eu/upload.cs/0/03f5ce84_1_pamatkova_zona_zlin_hranice.jpg (cit. 21.2.2009).

¹⁸ For examples of permitted extensions for the Letná district see for example <http://www.zlin.eu/page/37461.pristavby-ctvrtdomku-ve-ctvrti-letna-zlin/>; for recommended changes to houses see the document issued by the Town Hall (NOVÁ 2006).

the former approves any proposed reconstruction), and possibly the Culture Department (which has responsibility for the Program for the Regeneration of the Urban Heritage Zone, see Fig 4) and in conjunction with this, the National Heritage Office, which issues expert opinions on proposals.

The current owners of the houses, thanks to their progressive sale into private hands, make up an increasingly differentiated group of occupiers, who are distinguished on the one hand by the type of household in which they live, but also by their income and different lifestyles and values. At the present time living in the originally workers districts can be a relatively costly affair, with the prices of already reconstructed semi-detached houses reaching 4 million CZK. As one of our interviewees describes it, *“this semi is a kind of emergency measure within Zlín for living in the centre of town, with not far to go [to the center] and to have a bit of ground for these flowers”* saying that, originally, *“he wanted to live in a house on the edge of Zlín.”* This 35-year-old man talks of an emergency measure mainly because of the costly reconstruction into which he has invested some 2 million CZK. Another occupier who with his wife has owned a semi-detached house since 2000, summarized its condition before reconstruction in this very illustrative account: *“It was like this, there was just one gas heater for the whole building, more or less no kitchen, the bathroom sort of had tiles, but only just, well, it was just awful, you can’t imagine how anyone could live in it, there was only hot water from a water heater, and the waste pipe hadn’t been fixed in the kitchen, so that you could wash dishes in the sink. The kitchen floor was some sort of wood which had fallen in one place, it was creaking. When it was ripped out, they discovered there was a twenty-centimetre gap between the bath waste outlet and the main waste pipe, so water was everywhere.”* If we summarized the terms which interviewees, male and female, use to describe problems with living in these houses, they are mainly *“water”* and the linked *“rot”* and *“mould.”* and the *“chilliness”* and *“cold”* linked to the materials used. They mainly point out signs of decay: the house is getting old, changing. The walls are shifting slightly and are cracking. The building technique used is specific – brick walls normally of 30cm thickness (later increased to 45cm), plastered only on the inside¹⁹ let in both winter cold and summer heat. Earlier cold was normal in other kinds of buildings as well; today however older residents think of their own recollections rather as unusual: *“There*

¹⁹ At one point they experimented with warm-air heating between the brick wall and a plastered inner wooden wall.

was no heating upstairs,²⁰ so I remember that when it was frosty, the ice crystals would sparkle on the walls (laughs) and the spoons would freeze in our tea.” (Interviewer: “So it was actually freezing indoors?”) “Indoors, yes. We would make up hot-water bottles and winter socks, something to pop on our heads, a cap, and went to bed...” The red brick material is an important visual element of the town, the streets and the houses. But it is also the thing that limits and determines the way of life in the house and the scope for modifications.

The size of the internal spaces of a house can also be perceived as giving rise to “cosiness.” One example could be the narrative of a student, whose relationship to renting in one of the four-apartment houses can best be described with the word “tender”: “No one has looked after the house much for a long time, so the hot water doesn’t work in the kitchen [...] blocked pipe or something. But other than that – it’s made up for in summer by the garden – and well, the house as a whole. It has its own charm.” The specific circumstances of the building of the house and its appearance can also be used to justify satisfaction with the original layout of the accommodation: “Well, the house is smart. [...]I think these houses are pretty smart on the whole. There is not much space, but actually when you live here, you find you do not really need that much space. There is enough room here. That the bathroom is so small doesn’t really matter, and the kitchen – well, it’s enough. And that it’s well put together.”

Let us now look at specific examples that are the subject of the foregoing narratives, which also serve to legitimize the changes taking place in the houses. We have focussed on certain elements of the house which prove to be significant places in everyday use.

Stairs

Stairs are the place which is at the very heart of the house. Their function is purely connective, they are not used for people to live in; they are intended for movement “up” and “down.” The stairs are that part of the house which is most resistant to changes and withstands them best. At first glance they most resemble a ladder. They divide the house into two defined parts, and to a large degree determine their use. The stairs in the house can be perceived as an obstacle to be overcome on a daily basis, which affects the everyday practices of the occupants “...at home, when I go downstairs, I go down to the bathroom and then,

²⁰ The heater was in the bottom half of the house, with warm air let in to the upper floor through a ceiling vent. In addition, it was not possible to use the heating at night for reasons of safety.

because I am still asleep, I wake up in the bathroom and want to get dressed and I go upstairs but then there, where the windows are, then I go back to the bathroom, take my things back down to the bathroom, where I get dressed [...] then that is when the stairs bother me, because if I forget something, then I have to go back upstairs and then come down again.” In view of the size or, more exactly, the smallness of the bathroom and the lower room of the four-apartment house this young woman living on her own maintains the habit of keeping her clothes in the upper part of the house in the bedroom, gathering her clothes in the lower part of the house during the week and generally laundering them with other things at the end of the week and putting them away again *“upstairs.”* The practicality of building separate apartments on two floors was, as we have mentioned, driven mainly by the effort to create two identical living units, the *“upstairs”* and *“downstairs”* being maintained within one apartment and not being the factor that differentiates apartments.²¹

The main feature of the stairs emphasized by the occupants is their dangerousness. *“I simply do not understand how she (the previous occupant) could carry the baby downstairs here – I am always afraid that when it starts toddling, that – that it might fall down these stairs or something – I really don’t know – I was saying – that I would put in a fireman’s slide here- it is the only thing I am afraid of really – because when you have children – it is a bit frightening – but I don’t know – because we would want to make a children’s room out of the study.”* As this extract from an interview with a 30-year-old woman shows, one has to deal mainly with its steepness and the banister, which is not suitable for small children. In some of the layouts, the stairs form a dangerous place – an open hole – at the upper end. If the occupants are older or ill, the stairs mean that they do not use the upper floor in practice, that they *“withdraw”* to the downstairs rooms. We met one elderly woman for whom the bedroom served as a storeroom to keep wreathes for several months before All Souls’ Day, as a store for things she does not need too often, because it is too difficult and hazardous.²² Another interviewee described the situation at

²¹ In spite of the attempt at equality (indeed not so much equality as comparability) of the apartments, we find some features which are perceived as distinctive – not in relation to *upstairs/downstairs*, but linked to the relative positioning vis-a-vis the street, to the *“sunny side”* and to the points of the compass. A large part is also played by the size of the garden belonging to a particular apartment. This is not however even the result of the urban design of the surrounding area, as much as the aforementioned *“use”* and negotiation between neighbors.

²² This example does not however come from the research in Zlín, but from a visit to a standardized house in the town of Svit in Slovakia.



Stairs with rope.



Stairs with Wendy.

her parents, who live in a detached house: *“They had their bedroom upstairs because there it is simpler, being a detached house, it is better and they have an extension, so in essence they have two rooms downstairs, in one they have a bedroom, and in the other a room for their grandchildren when they come. So upstairs there are two rooms which are quite unusable. So they have furniture there, they clean, they heat it, air it, but no one lives up there and no one sleeps there.”* Often it is the stairs which prevent changes to other parts of the house; in some types of house they go through the middle to separate the kitchen and the living room – two rooms which are often part of reconstruction.

Kitchen

The original kitchen was conceived as a workplace – mainly for women’s work. It was intended for wives who would by their efforts create a domestic background for workers in the factory; their education within the Baťa system was aimed at this assumed role, since it was assumed that after marriage they would no longer be working outside the home. The image of the respectable working family was an integral part of the myth.²³ The justifications for changes to the kitchen are thus linked to a number of social changes which have taken place in Czech society since the time of Tomáš and Jan Antonín Baťa. Perhaps the most visible change is exactly the change in the position of the woman and the places in the home linked to her role. This does not mean that the kitchen has ceased to be a workplace; by all accounts it remains primarily a place for women’s work, but it gains new significance within the house – we may say that it is re-integrated into the living room (in the same way, for example, as it was in traditional country buildings). The knocking through of the kitchen and living room, the two ground-floor rooms which are the same in the four-apartment and semi-detached houses, is brought about by the occupant’s effort to increase

²³ It is also interesting to follow how the change in this situation is reflected in occupiers’ answers – in connection with the Letná district we heard “stories” about “seamstresses,” unmarried mothers living in the smallest houses: *“It was dreadfully hard work for next to nothing and these ladies, I’ll call them ladies, OK? So in fact they did not hesitate to swear, because their life was so hard that they had no choice and that was the way they brought up their children. And those generations, they are still there. There, I can see how it has changed there, but two-thirds of the occupants are the originals, or their children”* and elsewhere *“There were these unmarried mothers, who had various men and a child with each of them and then stayed on living here, and then later left.”* The narrative also contains an expression of the contemporary idea of the reproduction of social inequalities within the district, which our discussion partner mentioned in the context of talking about the problems she had with her neighbors at her previous house. In Barthian terminology these stories about seamstresses represent an evident countermyth.



Kitchen prior to reconstruction – semi-detached house.



Kitchen after reconstruction – four-apartment house.

living space (“*here [in a four-apartment house] there were a stove and a sink, but no worktop*”), but also by the demands of social life, which takes place in this altered place: “*It is pleasant for me, because most of my life takes place in the kitchen, just like for my grandmother in the semi. I just love it.*” An open space is created, its areas remain separate only in a symbolic manner. But in contrast to her grandmother this (50-year-old) woman stays at home to work, which she can do from home on her computer. The space which she uses every day is workroom, living room and kitchen – the various functions are defined as zones, rather than as rooms.²⁴

Children’s room

The need to provide or expand space for children is a further significant justification used by occupants in connection with reconstruction. “*Well I am looking forward to when we have that extension there; there will be a children’s room, so all the toys and everything will go in there. The children, and when we have visitors, like a child, then they will not be going up and down the stairs dragging their pram and bed and can do that on their own here, and will not need so much help on the stairs.*” From the beginning the houses offered the option of creating two rooms “upstairs,” one of which served as a children’s bedroom. But the reminiscences of our witnesses contain no reference to a “children’s room” as a separate place intended for their games, their privacy and personal development. In this respect the garden and the area surrounding the house were an important extension: “*Our children grew up on the street [...] I cannot imagine our children any other way, from very young. I had a small bed here as well, they would wake up early, I would put the pram out and would feed them, dress them, everything, then they just came home in the evening. The same with eating, when they were older, we ate outside, they simply were not at home.*” This lifestyle was significantly different from the current everyday practices of the occupants.

* * *

²⁴ However her daily program once more reveals a division of the house into “upstairs” and “downstairs.” The working day starts at 6.30 a.m. by “coming downstairs” to the bathroom, with a cold shower – with daily activities taking place more or less in the lower part of the house (the upper floor contains the bedroom and the room of her son, who now lives independently).

The idea of “home” was a major part of the Bafa myth. “Home” was not only a place of privacy and child care, but was, like other aspects of life in the town, subject to supervision by the authorities: *“Mummy said that they came and took a look at how she looked after me, how she looked after the child. And if the house was clean [...] If the children had clean things and so on [...] they were disliked, people were afraid of them.”* In reminiscences the vocabulary of the communist era, “screening,” is often linked to the supervision which the Bafa administration (the company Personnel Department) applied to workers’ families. *“They would come from the Department, on a visit, into people’s houses and inspect their accommodation, always asking: well, how are you getting on, are you saving, what have you bought recently, these were points [...] Those were plus points if they were considering promoting someone, if they were saving, buying things, doing something for their family and taking care of them, then if two people were up for a position, then it was about who had more of these points.”*

Conclusion

In the first part of this article we presented myth and utopia side by side. Myth as a specific form of speech which has the character of constituting the world, justifies and naturalizes social rules. Myth gives the world the quality of naturalness. If we think of it in conjunction with utopia, which by contrast calls the existing order into doubt and points out its social origins, we can say that it is ideological.

We have shown that Bafa Zlín can be considered under both categories – mythical and utopian. It seems that a story which has the function of a myth can also under certain circumstances support utopian endeavors and that in the historical vicissitudes of Czechoslovak society there thus arose the basis for a myth about the “Shoemaker who conquered the world” (ERDÉLY 1990). Just like any myth this narrative is of course also ideological (and has its “countermyth” (BARTHES 2004) mainly in the story of Bafa’s collaboration – see footnote 2). Therefore, alongside the undoubted benefits in the shape of improved living standards, access to education and so on, we do not want to forget this emancipation had another side to it: that of firm discipline. As we pointed out, the specific socio-economic system was imprinted in the material site of the city and into its urban design – as a “materialization of spatial utopy” (in David Harvey’s words).

The concept of worker housing is also part of this strategy: the joining

together of emancipation and disciplination. We believe that in studying the current form of life in these houses we can contribute an ideologically unburdened look at the whole Zlín urban and social project. In the second part of our work we were therefore interested in how the present occupiers deal with the original intentions embodied in the materials and form of the houses in which they live. Our main focus was on the inhabitants' perceptions of the houses and their remodelling concerning three examples that occurred to be important to our interviewees and their everyday experience in Bata houses: the stairs, the kitchen and the children's room. The overall text is thus linked by descriptions of current practices and everyday activities, the reminiscences of eyewitnesses concerning worker housing and life in a "materialized utopia." It shows us the ways in which people come to terms with a disciplined (and disciplining) space²⁵. We have tried to point out those layers of the Zlín myth which are connected to housing, the home and the family. This cross-fading illustrates the continuity of the living in these houses and at the same time it helps to understand the directions of its consequent development.

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²⁵ We should not at the same time forget that, if the original form of discipline linked with the work of the factory has now disappeared, a new form has appeared linked to the workings of the urban heritage zone.

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