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## ***Toponymy in a Socialist City – the Cities of Ostrava-Poruba, Havířov and Most (Czech Republic)\****

### **1. Introduction**

The main purpose of the text is to summarize and present key findings from research on urbanonymy in Czech modern cities. The research was realized in the cities of Ostrava-Poruba, Havířov and Most between 2011 and 2016. This was not only focused on gathering of standardized and popular urban place names, but also attempted to find out, or map, their common knowledge and usage within the city communication. Urban place names were also examined from the local identity perspective as an important part of local memory – predominantly in case of Most, the city that was demolished and newly built.

### **2. A Socialist city in the centre of research**

The term *a Socialist city* can be understood in several ways. However, probably the most frequent image of the Socialist city from the Central European perspective is represented by the following two types. There are cities typical with an imposing main avenue entrance guarded by residential towers, a regular urban pattern and streets surrounded by the blocks of flats shaped in a decorative style of the so-called Stalin Renaissance, or later with impersonal concrete estates bursting into the city centre or creating a wall around it. After the fall of Communism in Central Europe, the latter, which were pejoratively labelled “logging houses” or “rabbit hutches”, were not interesting for researchers to study them. But nowadays, twenty-eight years after the Velvet Revolution (1989), Czech postwar (modern or modernist) cities are in the centre of leading interdisciplinary research; they are an interesting topic for sociology, architecture, demography, history (cf. MAYER–BENSA–HUBINGER 1997, ŠRAJEROVÁ 2006, FERENČUHOVÁ–GAČANOVÁ–VACKOVÁ 2010, NOVOTNÁ 2010, STRAKOŠ 2010, MALURA–TOMÁŠEK 2012, SOUKUPOVÁ–LUTHER–SALNER 2014, ZARECOR ELMAN 2015, JEMELKA–ŠEVEČEK 2016, SPURNÝ 2016), and also for linguistics; many studies and books on this issue have appeared, even the specialized Czech journal of *Lidé města / Urban People* has been published since 1999.

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In general, the linguistic approach to the cities in the Czech context was – and still is – mostly aimed at research on spoken language (“*městská mluva*”); if concentrating in particular on onomastic research, this is, in the long term, aimed at standardized urbanonymy (street and square names), and its development and changes in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (DAVID 2012). But a view of the city surpassing the traditional city core opened space for new approaches and concepts that are currently elaborated, “discovered” in Czech (or Czechoslovak) urban-area onomastic research. These are: 1. examining the relationship between standardized and popular (non-standardized) urbanonymies (DAVID–MÁCHA 2014, DAVID–MÍSTECKÝ 2016); 2. application of the linguistic/political landscape concepts on the place names research (HÁJEK 2002, HÁJEK 2008, DAVID 2011: 42–49, DAVID–MÁCHA 2014: 14–44, DAVID 2016b); 3. memory studies: e.g. perception of commemorative street names, mostly from the Communist era, in a non-ideological way as a part of cultural heritage, culture of commemoration, local memory and *genius loci*, and preservation of them (DAVID 2013, KOJETÍNOVÁ 2013, DAVID–MÁCHA 2014: 138–177, DAVID 2016a); 4) interpretation of the place names-material in the sociolinguistic perspective: e.g. the micro-social toponymy concept (KRŠKO 2013, DAVID–MÁCHA 2014, KOJETÍNOVÁ 2016, DAVID 2018).

### 3. A Socialist city definition

Before I concentrate my attention on the specificities of Socialist city urbanonymy, it is necessary to define the research object. I use the definition of “pure Socialist city” formulated by Slovak sociologist RENÉ MATLOVIČ (2004). This is described as a city built as a totally new urban object on a green field after 1945, and characteristically with the absence of an older settlement layer. Its functions had a crucial impact on its specific urban structure; the city was planned mostly as a residential area for new Socialist people – the blocks of flats surrounding the main avenue, the wide avenue intended for Communist anniversary parades, the absence of a main square in a traditional sense; sacral objects – such as a church or chapel, and also cemetery – were not included in the urban structure. RENÉ MATLOVIČ divides Socialist cities into four categories according to the share of modern urban development and the existence/absence of a previous urban settlement. From the perspective of my research issue, the first and second types are of particular importance: 1) totally new cities built on a green field: e.g. Nová Dubnica (Slovakia), Tychy (Poland), Dunaújváros (Hungary), Eisenhüttenstadt (Germany), and also Havířov (Czechia); 2) projects realized as independent city districts within existing cities that are close to independent city organisms: e.g. Kraków-Nowa Huta (Poland), Halle-Neustadt (Germany), Košice-Šaca (Slovakia), Ostrava-Poruba (Czechia). Within this



type, a specific case is represented by the city of Most, which was transferred and newly built.

#### **4. The specificity of Socialist city urbanonymy**

In the following text, I would like to present the specificities of urbanonymy of Socialist cities illustrated with examples of Czech cities. There are Havířov: a city founded in 1955 after the public city-name competition; Ostrava-Poruba: a city district planned to replace the old city of Ostrava after 1945; and Most: a new city built in the course of demolition of the old one between 1965–1987. I examine the cities mentioned above from the perspective of two layers of urban place names, which differ from each other in the existence or the absence of the standardization. The first layer is represented by the standardized forms of street and square names. They are formed by political and ideological powers, and supported/protected by the process of standardization; dynamism of the layer results from the political changes. The second layer is non-standardized (popular, *živá* ‘living’) urbanonymy. This is a specific naming system used by inhabitants of the city; these names penetrate the standardized urbanonymy, i.e. they can become standardized forms, its dynamism resulting from generation changes.

Leaving aside discussions on the city names, or even the public city-name competition at the moment of a city’s foundation (see DAVID 2011: 129–131, 134–154), the Socialist cities were not planned with street names from the very beginning. At the time of a city’s birth, when the first block of flats appeared on a muddy field, only the numeric system – block-of-houses numbers, school numbers, and numbers of city building districts – was used for orientation. These numeric systems are still used in everyday communication – e.g. naming of schools (*První škola, Druhá škola* ‘1<sup>st</sup> School, 2<sup>nd</sup> School’, etc.), detecting city districts (*Prvák, Druhák, Trojka* ‘the First, the Second, the Third’, etc.; *Stovky, Dvojstovky, Osmistovky* ‘Hundreds, Two Hundreds, Eight Hundreds’) and also blocks of flats. The numeric system is predominantly developed in the city of Most and can be regarded as an orientation system which is independent or parallel to the standardized urbanonymy. Later, the numeric systems were gradually replaced by standardized street names reflecting a particular period of time and typical with the prevalence of commemorative (mostly personal) street names / motive. When one looks at the street names in the cities from the temporal perspective, it is possible to catch the main tendencies in their development – from an eclectic mixture of motives, commemorative street names based on personal names (writers, music composers, political leaders) in the 50s, to non-political/non-ideological street names (tree and flower names) typical of the 70s and the 80s. Because of the high percentage of commemorative street names (cf. DAVID 2011: 175–183), after the 1989 Velvet Revolution, renamings were done only in case of the main streets and squares; new – more or



less – apolitical namings were used (e.g. Havířov: *Gottwaldova třída* ‘Gottwald Avenue’ > *Hlavní třída* ‘Main Avenue’, *Leninova třída* ‘Lenin Avenue’ > *Národní třída* ‘National Avenue’, *Antonína Zápotockého* ‘Antonín Zápotocký Avenue’ > *Dlouhá třída* ‘Long Avenue’). But the process of “decommunization” of urbanonymy caused “strange” and totally inappropriate street names changes to be made – e.g. Havířov: *Fučíkova* ‘Fučík Street’ > *Anglická* ‘English Street’, *náměstí 9. května* ‘9<sup>th</sup> May Square’ > *T. G. Masaryka* ‘T. G. Masaryk Square’; Ostrava-Poruba: *Fučíkova* ‘Fučík Street’ – *Porubská* ‘Poruba Street’, *náměstí 9. Května* ‘9<sup>th</sup> May Square’ > *U Oblouku* ‘At the Arc’; cf. also Nowa Huta, the district of Kraków, Poland: *Majakowskiego* ‘Mayakovsky Street’ > *Obrońców Krzyża* ‘Crux Defenders Street’, *Alej Lenina* ‘Lenin Alley’ > *Alej Solidarności* ‘Solidarity Movement Alley’, *Planu 6-letniego* ‘Six-Year Plan Street’ > *Jana Pawła II* ‘John Paul II Street’. Examining these cases, we face two questions that are raised by the process of renaming: “Should the original standardized urbanonymy from the Socialist era be preserved, or not?” and “Is this a part of local cultural heritage?” – I discussed them in my previous research and in both cases my answer was “yes” (cf. DAVID 2013). There are several reasons for this: not only renaming as a very complicated task for local authorities and inhabitants, a weak general public knowledge “who is who” behind a particular commemorative street name, but also a perception of commemorative names as a part of cultural heritage and a genius loci of the Socialist cities.

As to the popular urbanonymy issue, it has to be emphasized that the same as in the standardized urbanonymy, specific characteristics can be detected in non-standardized urbanonymy, too. Popular urbanonymy in Socialist cities is typical with: 1) repeating (non-innovative, similar) popular names motivation caused a) by the similarity of the Socialist cities’ urbanism, predominantly visible in the case of the Stalin-era cities; cf. repeating names *U Labužníka* ‘At Labužník (= delicatessen)’, *U Lenina* ‘At Lenin (statue)’, *U rondlu* ‘At the Roundabout’, *Kravin* ‘A Cowshed (a long and low market building)’; b) by the absence of unique architectural urban objects (landmarks such as a church or monastery, a city hall, a Baroque column); from the perspective of motivation, these traditional city objects are replaced by shopping centres, bars, restaurants, or sculptural artefacts and specific architectural elements – their names form the base of place names; cf. city public transport stops names *Věžičky* ‘Small Spires’, *U Podloubí* ‘At the Arcade’, *U Oblouku* ‘At the Arc’; 2) numeric systems in names used for orientation; 3) different generation/social group usage vs. shared names; 4) visualization of names as a relevant factor that supports preservation of a particular name, frequently in case of closed shops and institutions the names of which are still saved in the public space – e.g. on the wall, or in the names of a pub or frequently a public transport stop situated nearby; 5) the existence of rich name-lore, such as puns (language jokes)

and sayings, connected with particular objects or place names, cf. the current research in Prague during the Communist era done by MARTINA PTÁČNÍKOVÁ (2017); cf. ironic namings *Pakul*, *Husákova stodola*, *Lidojem*, *Moby Dick* ‘an abbreviation of its official name, President Husák’s Barn, People Collector, Moby Dick’ for the Prague *Palác kultury* ‘the Palace of Culture’, the place of the Communist Party meetings.

## 5. Conclusions

The main aim of the paper was not only to attempt to summarize basic facts about urban names and naming characteristics of Czech Socialist cities, but also to point out the importance of the modern cities as an attractive research topic. Onomastics provides only one, but an important linguistic view on this within the complex approach to the city place names as a part of city texts and linguistic landscape. An active role of onomastics in the multidisciplinary approach to the urban area research can restart or bring an inspiring energy for further onomastic investigations, including an application of topical trends in urban studies.

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## Abstract

The paper is aimed at the toponymy (urbanonymy) of three Czech cities, the city of Ostrava-Poruba, Havířov and Most. The uniqueness of the cities and their toponymic landscapes lies in their specific position. The cities represent post-war Socialist housing estates built on a greenfield site. The presentation focuses on toponymy in the newly built cities, particularly on the existence of non-standardized forms of urban names against the background of standardized street name forms, and also examines the role of place names in the creation and preservation of local identities and memories of the cities. The paper presents the main results from two research projects on the toponymy of modern Czech cities effected in 2011–2016.

**Keywords:** urbanonymy, Socialist cities, standardized street names, popular street names, Czech urbanonymy

