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The Myth of Žižkov: Searching Underground

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Declaration

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Prague,

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Olivia Morris Andersén

Image 1: Husitská Street, Prague. 2022.



Image Source: Author's own photograph

Abstract (ENG)

This content analysis concentrates on a district in the Czech capital Prague, called Žižkov. It is argued that the “social myth” of Žižkov does not fully comply with its current socioeconomic condition. The “gentrification” of the area seems generally well known, however, the social narrative of Žižkov hangs on to its “underground” image.

To trace the divergence between narrative and image, the theoretical framework is based on mythological and hegemonic, discursive structures. Thus, this study takes the main empirical base in historical and contemporary documentation in the form of photography. The data sources therefore include historical accounts of existing, qualitative documentation by historically active photographers, as well as contemporary image-makers in Žižkov.

Based on the content sampled in this analysis, it is suggested that the myth of Žižkov today, though still retaining “underground” elements, has become saturated with commercial undertones. As such, the current forces of gentrification seem to coexist with older values, such as the “underground” and “unruly” lifestyles. But contemporary images, at least from the samples provided in this case, do not show much political sense of this current friction, as opposed to the older photographs.

Resumé (CZ)

Tato analýza se soustředí na čtvrť v Praze, zvanou Žižkov. Argumentuje přitom, že „sociální mýtus“ Žižkova plně neodpovídá jeho současnému socioekonomické stavu. „Gentrifikace“ oblasti se zdá být všeobecně známá, nicméně sociální narativ Žižkova se stále odvíjí od jeho „undergroundové“ image.

Tato případová studie tedy využívá jako základní empirický materiál historickou a současnou fotografickou dokumentaci Žižkova, aby s její pomocí sledovala jeho socioekonomické proměny a proměny s ním spjatých narativů. Zdroje dat tak zahrnují dostupné historické výpovědi, kvalitativní dokumentaci od historicky aktivních fotografů i současných fotografických vyobrazení Žižkova.

Výsledkem je zjištění, že Žižkov se politicky nestal méně významným než v minulosti; síly gentrifikace koexistují se staršími hodnotami, jako je „podzemní“ a „neposlušný“ životní styl. Současné fotografie, nicméně nevystihují politický rozměr tohoto současného tření.

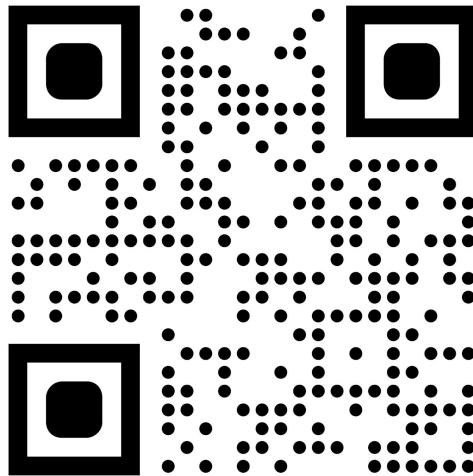
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The Annexation includes:

- 8.1 Part 1: Historical Images
- 8.2 Part 2: Contemporary Images

1.Introduction

The following paper examines to what extent contemporary social value systems (in this case, the social process of gentrification) have the ability to create modern myth. Specifically, it will analyse Žižkov; a district in the Czech capital, Prague. The basic line of argumentation will be that the “social myth” of Žižkov does not fully comply with the socioeconomic situation happening there now. Even though the process of “gentrification” of the area is generally recognized and acknowledged, the social narrative of Žižkov still seems to hang on to its “underground” image, as the “Harlem of Prague”.

This case study relies on historical and contemporary photographic documentation as the primary empirical basis to track the socioeconomic changes versus narrative shifts, related to Žižkov. Moreover, it builds on a qualitative approach by including a theoretical framework based on mythological and hegemonic discursive structures. This is then applied to a content analysis. As such, the data sources include historical accounts of existing, qualitative documentation by historically active photographers, as well as contemporary image-makers in Žižkov.

The findings of this study show that is not the case that Žižkov has become “less political” or that it’s politically less significant than during the plans of redevelopment in the 1970’s; now more than ever is it important to show how the forces of gentrification are coexisting with older values, such as the “underground” and “unruly” lifestyles. However, contemporary images, at least from the samples provided in this case, do not show much sense of antagonism or political awareness as they used to.

Finally, this research does not aim to claim definite causation between historical events and contemporary discourse. However, it suggests that the contemporary, political discourse concerning urban development in Žižkov has become rather ambiguous, which may have helped to facilitate the gentrification of the area.

1.1 Background

This section aims to provide a rationale for employing the theoretical framework, which constitutes a crucial aspect of the overall argument presented in this paper. Accordingly, some essential, contextual details about Žižkov will be explored, in order to elucidate how the divergence between its socioeconomic condition and its cultural image (“myth”) has arisen.

Prague consists of fifty-seven, self-governing city districts. However, few of them have such a characteristic and unique atmosphere as Prague’s third district, Žižkov, located on the south-eastern edge of the inner city. Since the turn of the 20th century, the Žižkov region has experienced a significant expansion and was officially designated as one of Prague's newly incorporated districts in 1922.

was a worker's district in several ways. Historically, Žižkov was populated by working-class families who had moved to Prague to find employment in the factories and industrial facilities located in the area. Thus, many buildings in Žižkov were constructed as low-cost housing for these workers. Additionally, the district was known for its vibrant labor movement, with many workers participating in strikes and other forms of protest in the early 20th century. Even after the communist takeover in 1948, Žižkov remained a working-class area, and the Communist Party often used it as a base of support (Šulcová, 2017).

Nonetheless, as noted by Prague-based journalist Lukaš Funk, it is not widely known that in the 1970s, a group of urban planners devised a "Redevelopment Plan"¹ that aimed to permanently alter the character of Žižkov. To be more specific, the plan was to demolish the entire housing complex and substitute it with pre-manufactured residences.

Thus, a key insight offered in the subsequent study is that while the planned redevelopment never came to full fruition, a similar process of transformation has persisted over a more protracted period, than initially envisioned.

In general, Prague has undergone an unparalleled period of "urban development" since the 1990s, which has been witnessed by both its inhabitants and tourists alike. However, the intention and scope of the redevelopment of Žižkov was approved already in 1973. Four years later the first demolitions and the subsequent construction of the new

¹ Commonly referred to as *Asanace* in Czech.

prefabricated houses took place. However, subsequent phases of redevelopment were unable to meet the projected timelines and the entire endeavor was ultimately abandoned in the aftermath of the events of 1989².

At the time, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, which was the sole governing political party, viewed the extensive demolition and reconstruction of Žižkov as a significant accomplishment and a model of progressive socialist housing policy. For this reason, the redevelopment of Žižkov was widely promoted in newspapers and in several purpose-created television films, as these socialist interests were in line with the ideological pursuits of the government at that time (Funk, 2014).

Though, the government justified the “redevelopment” on the grounds of poor housing conditions, deteriorating technical infrastructure and neglected gas systems in the area, these issues were primarily the result of mismanagement and run down building practices, rather than inherent flaws in the original construction, according to Funk.

As argued by Funk, one of the motivations behind revitalising this district was to disperse its’ distinctive and difficult-to-control population. This alternative and countercultural population had accumulated there as a result of the area’s ambiance, coupled with its affordable housing (Funk, 2014). One particularly prominent group in the area was the Roma community.

Žižkov was, however, also typically constructed in a cost-effective and time-efficient manner, which likely also compromised the overall quality of the buildings. Builders commonly employed excavated clay for the bricks and utilized sand and stone simultaneously, which occasionally resulted in structural failures and tragic outcomes. Even now, there is ongoing debate as to whether these houses meet the standards for adequate housing (Šulcová, 2017).

Consequently, these apartments became homes for people who did not have high housing demands. As such, Žižkov accommodated people who could not afford any better, and for other reasons were not welcomed, in other districts. Though the

² The Velvet Revolution (Czech: *Sametová revoluce*) or Gentle Revolution (Slovak: *Nežná revolúcia*) was a non-violent transition of power in what was then Czechoslovakia. It took place from November 17 to November 28, 1989. Popular demonstrations against the one-party government (the *Communist Party of Czechoslovakia*) resulted in the cease of 41 years of one-party rule, as well as the subsequent dismantling of the command economy and conversion to a parliamentary republic (Radio Praha, 2011).

redevelopment initiative was only in its initial stages, the considerable number of structures that were demolished compelled numerous individuals to relocate.

From its inception, the plan for such a radical and unnecessary reconstruction of Žižkov was never met with understanding from the local population. Older citizens in particular had a hard time coming to terms with leaving their home district and its drastic transformation and eventual move to South of Prague, or other panel housing estates (Funk, 2014).

By the end of the 1980s, a group of young architects stood up against the progressing redevelopment works, who protested in the form of newspaper articles and leaflets against the drastic and unnecessary destruction of a historically valuable part of Prague. Also, their demands included the development of a new spatial plan, a method for modernising existing buildings, instead of completely rebuilding them, together with the widest possible involvement of local residents in these processes (Funk, 2014).

One of the key activities of the young architects was the organisation of an exhibition with the aim of pointing out the consequences of the rehabilitation of Žižkov. It was supplemented with a number of thematic and politically motivated photographs by, among others, the Czech photographer Jaroslav Kocourek. According to Funk, the last houses in Žižkov, according to the official plan, were demolished in the early 1990s.

Thus, the political tension was between the residents (ymostly workers') actual interests and those of the government's workers' party, rather than a traditional left-right ideological divide.

Additionally, due to the impact of economic development and globalization, modern cities, particularly their commercial districts, are increasingly resembling one another as local cultures are suppressed by foreign influences. This trend is contributing to the loss of unique features in historic commercial areas, underscoring the significance of preserving these sites (Qian, 2012).

Despite the initial plan for redevelopment, affordable housing has persisted in Žižkov, particularly in the vicinity of Husitská Street (Pirodsky, 2017). However, this is gradually changing, as the Roma community, who comprised a significant portion of the district, has relocated, and an increasing number of young professionals, “creatives”, as well as families and long-term residents, expatriates and foreign students are moving in.

Given that the redevelopment plans for Žižkov were not formally cancelled, it is worth considering their implications for the area today. While these plans were not

actively pursued due to broader political unrest, they were not officially terminated either. Therefore, it is possible to view the redevelopment as an ongoing process, continuously influenced by a broader range of factors beyond just the Czechoslovakian government's actions in the 1970s.

1.2 Purpose and research argumentation

This paper investigates the extent to which current social value systems, specifically the gentrification process, can generate modern myths. The central argument posits that the prevailing social myth of Žižkov does not entirely align with the area's present socioeconomic conditions.

Although Žižkov possesses a unique photographic history, there is a lack of research that employs photographic or visual depictions of the area as a primary source, despite their significance in shaping the locality's identity. As such, this investigation seeks to establish a connection between cultural studies and photography.

Moreover, there is presently an evident discourse surrounding Žižkov, with prevailing myths portraying it as a subcultural community characterized by pubs, drug addicts, and homeless individuals. Thus, the rapid increase of commercial interests in the area has caused local dissatisfaction.

Therefore, the aim is to illustrate that Žižkov has not lost its political significance; in fact, it is now more crucial than ever to showcase how the forces of gentrification clash with traditional values such as the "underground" and "unconventional" lifestyles. As modern imagery seems to lack any sense of conflict or political consciousness, it will be of central importance to observe whether alterations in the genre of documentary photography have played a role in the rise of gentrification.

1.3 Previous research

It can be observed in the work of documentary or urban photographers, that they often abandon their investigations in the early stages of gentrification. In this fashion, it will be inquired what significance it could have to continue documenting gentrification as a sociological process, where both traditional and "newer" influences are interacting. As such, it is possible to say that there exists a "visual research gap" when it comes to the process of gentrification. This is particularly true for the case of Žižkov.

As an example of this “visual research gap”, the work of Warsaw-based screenwriter and photographer Maciej Pisuk, will be discussed. Pisuk has captured a series of photographs that showcase the daily life in Praga - a dilapidated district located on the right bank of the Polish capital. Pisuk’s work primarily focuses on Brzeska street, where he resided himself, alongside documenting the living conditions of its inhabitants. It is worth noting that Praga should not be confused with Prague, as the similarity in names is merely coincidental.

Moreover, according to journalist Mikołaj Glński, in an interview with Pisuk, he explained that Pisuk settled on the right bank of the Vistula River long before the idea of Praga’s gentrification had even surfaced.



Image 2: Maciej Pisuk, Praga.

“An important moment was when I started visiting them (neighbours) in their flats. I realised that I was entering an extremely private space to which no one had access”, Pisuk told Glński. He shared that he felt like a loser, and that “I felt that these people, who I watched from the window, were losers as much as I was. This was what drew me to them” (Glński, 2012).

The photographer said that in his work, the key is reciprocity. “Meetings are more than seeing someone, random encounters, shaking hands, being aware of another person. A meeting is an event that involves certain ethics, there is always an immediate face-to-face relationship. The heroes of my photos have an unusual feature: they have faces” (Glński, 2012).

This issue touches upon a longstanding challenge in the realm of documentary photography, which, in essence, it suggests that in order to photograph someone who is experiencing hardship or disadvantage, the photographer must be in a similar position themselves; otherwise, it could be viewed as unethical. Is it accurate though, as a documentarist, to photograph people who are “just like yourself”?

Similarly to Žižkov, Praga is also an old workers district which holds a post-communist history. Visitors have often considered the working-class district of Praga

as an undesirable, or off-limits area to explore. Like Żiżkov, this off-beat neighborhood has now evolved into an "artsy" and "bohemian" enclave, and is now being actively promoted as a tourist attraction in Warsaw (McClane, 2023).

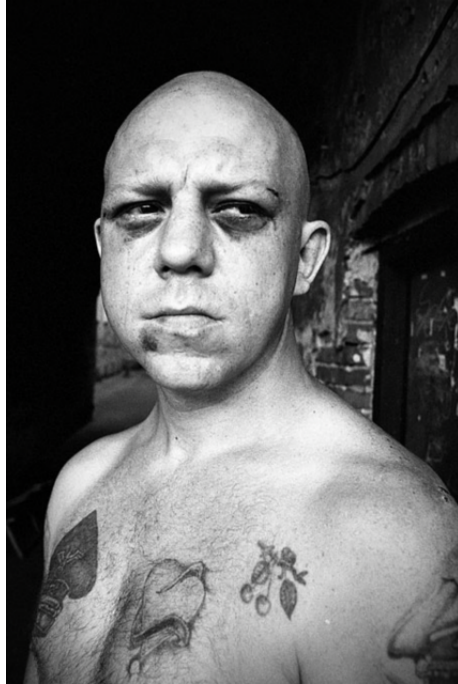


Image 3: Maciej Pisuk, Praga.

Praga and Żiżkov also share a history of facing neglect from the government over longer periods, just to face a more recent history of gentrification and foreign capital coming into the districts.

However, in both these cases, there seems to be very few cases of documentarists who continue their visual reports during the early stages of gentrification, including Pisuk. "The magic has gone". It is true that the atmosphere and the people change with the urban development and increasing investments.

However, the early stages of gentrification still hold a sociological process filled with extreme contrasts, as evidence of how coexisting social processes and values can exist together.

For example, in Żiżkov (and probably in Praga, too) it is possible to view the 19th century housing estates and newly constructed designer cafés in the same locale; poorly paid construction workers and businessmen working on the same street, graffiti and posters with obsolete themes and progressive art-collectives active in the same corner, and so on.

In essence, as most photographers abandon the documentation in the blooming stages of gentrification, some important observations can be lost. It is in this way the following analysis will fundamentally differ from many other visual researches and documentations.

2. Theory

The following section aims to propose a theoretical framework that can potentially highlight the main differences between the socioeconomic status of Żiżkov and its "underground" image. Though the proposed framework primarily emphasizes the

relevant components of visual discourse, it is not denied that there is a significant impact of verbal language on the general mythology of Žižkov. Three relevant theories will be used.

First, Roland Barthes' *Mythologies*, as well as Bennett and McDougalls' *Contemporary Readings of Mythology* will be used to understand how myth works as a) a social value system and institution, b) function of discursive signs interrelating with one another, c) a possibility of glorification and d) possible generator of imitation.

Secondly, Laclau and Mouffe's theory on Discursive Hegemony will be used to see how discursive trends can change over time, especially with reference to political changes. Finally, Christian Norberg Schultz's theory on Genius Loci will be used to see how urban photographers to orient themselves in a given location, with a sensitivity toward the passing of time and with the aim to "preserve".

The purpose of these three theories is to form a foundation for understand the extent of how the process of gentrification has permeated Žižkov's current mythological narrative. It is shaped in order to detect whether major elements in the myth has more or less remained from an historical perspective, whilst the socioeconomic conditions are changing quite drastically. The foundational standpoint is that commercial interests have had an influence on urban development as well as documentary photography, whilst social narrative has not.

2.1 Barthes

2.1.1 Social Value Systems

In *Mythologies* (1957), structural linguist Roland Barthes examines the tendency of contemporary social value systems to create modern myth. The social value system, to Barthes, is essentially the social aspect of language. However, this idea can equally be applied to visual culture also, which Barthes argues in *Rhetoric of the Image* (Barthes, 1964).

Thus, in order to examine the extent which the "social myth" of Žižkov does not comply with its current socioeconomic situation, two important factors will be discussed in this section. First, how the photographer can use the code of photography as means to express personal thought. Secondly, the connection or correlation between (visual) signs.

Language, or visual forms of communication, is seen by Barthes as a social institution and a system of values. As the social aspects to language are described as “a collective contract which one must accept in its entirety if one wishes to communicate”, the linguistic “apparatus” must operate on two altitudes.

The first altitude, Barthes means, is the organized *structure* used for communication, which is commonly known as “language”. Secondly, the diversity appearing in language, as a consequence of usage by individual speakers is known as “parole” (Barthes, 1957, p.13). In this particular case, the term “language” will also encompass the structure of photography as a mode of expression that can be likened to a language in its own right.

Moreover, the structural level, language, is the social convention or value shared through a society which is systemised and standardised. On the contrary, parole is flexible because it is the actual expression at the individual level. However, its flexibility is considered limited due to the fact that speech by an individual cannot be free from the shared convention, the structure. As such, there is an overlap between the two altitudes.

As language can withstand changes initiated by an individual, it thus operates as a social institution and as a system of agreed-upon values. Whilst speech, however, in contrast to language (both an institution and system), is rather an individual act of selection and actualisation. The speaking subject can use the code of language as means to express personal thought. Speech, the author, or in this case photographer, is essentially engaging in a combinative activity that corresponds to an individual act and not to pure creation (Barthes, 1967, p. 14-15).

As such, Barthes continues, the meaning of sign cannot be derived solely from their association with entities in a separate and objective reality. Rather, they generate meaning by reference to each other. Thus, meaning is understood as a “value” or “social convention”, organised through the relations between signs (Barker, 2002, p. 29).

For instance, it is central to Barthes' argumentation that red is only meaningful in relation to the difference between red, green, blue, etc. These signs are then organised into a sequence which generate meaning through the social values of their usage in a particular context.

Traffic lights, for example, deploy red to signify “stop”, and green to signify “go”. This is the cultural code of traffic systems which temporally fixes the relationship between colours and meanings. The apparent meaning (when to stop or go) is thus an

outcome of cultural habituation, which results in the concealment of cultural coding practices.

In a more relevant example, it can be suggested that the cultural code of gentrification temporally fixes the relationship between urban changes and meanings. The apparent meaning (whether urban change causes “protest” or “acceptance”) is thus also a result of cultural conditioning, or habit, leading to cultural encodings appearing concealed.

Thus, as the gentrification of Žižkov is rapidly increasing, but the social narrative maintains its’ mythological ideas, particularly as seen in photographs of the area. It can suggest that, according to Barthes’ idea, the cultural conditioning is currently standing at a crossroads or existing in a moment of change, as in a vacuum.

In sum, the most important points from this section are, first, that the photographer (or, speaking subject) can use the code of photography as means to express personal thought. This pertains to an individual act, rather than a purely original creation. This can illuminate an important difference between public and private intention when it comes to the creation of photographs.

Secondly, there is always a correspondence between signs. For example, the apparent meaning of urban change, whether it causes “protest” or “acceptance”, is a result of cultural conditioning. Moreover, it can be implied that the cultural conditioning is currently in a state of flux, as opposed to a more politically charged narrative of the past. This is thought to be reflected in photographs without much context or interaction.

2.1.2 Mythologies

Up to this point, the discussion has focused on how the cultural conditioning shapes how the social narrative depicts Žižkov as “underground”, implying a contrast to the area’s gentrification. The next section will aim to provide more nuance by presenting three additional points. First, glorification of photographed subjects as “a form of moral blackmail”. Secondly, public photography can be recognised by the image of passion they present, not passion itself. Thirdly, imitation as photographs in terms of providing *information* rather than technical or material quality.

Barthes starts his discussion of “public imagery” by referring to the mechanisms underlying electoral photography. Similar mechanisms can be presumed in photographs created for any public context other than elections. For example, in photojournalism or

documentary photography, for instance those taken of Žižkov, there have undoubtedly been political intentions. Nevertheless, the intentions of documentary photography may vastly differ from those of electoral photography, but one should still acknowledge the persuasive nature of documentary works.

Barthes argues that what is transmitted through the photograph of a candidate are not the plans of said person, but the deeper motives. The candidate is as such not only a product and example but also a lure for the lifestyle he represents (Barthes, 1957, p.90).

Barthes notes the fact that political candidates use their image to present a particular social milieu. For instance, he exemplifies, it can involve portraying values like the security of family, adherence to legal and religious norms, or a sense of entitlement to certain bourgeois possessions such as Sunday Mass, xenophobia, steak and chips, and derogatory humor. In essence, these components amount to an ideological message (Barthes, 1957, p.91-92).

Regarding Žižkov, and in the context of this discussion, it is appropriate to examine how the elements captured in the photographs can be interpreted as a visual glorification of the "underground" or "countercultural" narrative.

Moreover, in another example Barthes discusses the effectiveness of this glorification in the sport of wrestling. In wrestling, Barthes begins to explain, is where the most socially-inspired nuances of passion are expressed with great enthusiasm and triumph. When the intensity reaches such a level, the authenticity of the passion becomes irrelevant, he argues. What the public wants is the image of passion, not passion itself (Barthes, 1957, p.16).

Thus, there is no issue of truth in wrestling any more than in theater. Both aim to provide a comprehensible depiction of typically private moral circumstances. In classical art, he continues, the focus is on external appearances rather than the internal experiences. This emphasis on form over substance is what makes classical art triumphant (Barthes, 1957, p.16).

The public is thus presented with a grand display of suffering, defeat and justice. The wrestler who suffers in a hold which is reputedly cruel (e.g. an arm-lock, or a twisted leg) offers an excessive portrayal of suffering; similar to legendary mythological themes, it resembles a primitive Pieta, or another example that the public can relate to (Barthes, 1957, p.17). This paper asserts that impactful documentary photography, with its great

influence and conviction, can also convey these legendary mythological themes.

As such, it is possible to apply the factors discussed on the analysis of the social myth and narrative of Žižkov, and to what extent it has changed (if at all) over time. In sum, the two central factors discussed in this section can be summarised as, firstly, glorification and photography as a veritable blackmail by means of moral values. Secondly, the image of passion; echoing legendary mythological themes.

2.1.3 Readings of Contemporary Culture

To analyse Barthes' theory on mythology in relation to contemporary images, this paper will incorporate significant modern interpretations of his work. Pete Bennett and Julian McDougall, two professors in culture- and media studies, have reimagined Barthes seminal text in a contemporary context, by contemporary academics.

The most important contribution to this particular analysis made by two of the selected academics, Menotti and Fernandez-Vincente, concerns the “Digital Age” and the current mass-production of images. To address the central argument of this paper, their main assertion will focus on the lack of inspiration and innovation in contemporary image-making. This lack is attributed to the prevalence of repetition and self-made factors leading to a preference for imitation over innovation, particularly in photography.

The two authors begin by arguing that the “Digital Age” is defined as the time when “the medium is the message”. Thus, myth assumes its natural role as the dominant system of communication, and simplifying complex human actions (Bennett and McDougall, 2013, p.45).

They continue by asking what the meaning of digital communications is. Mobile phones, tablets, laptops are naturalised objects that reveal semiological signs such as security, connectivity, fear of loneliness, anxiety, and most importantly; it signifies the power of creating one's own world of perceptions (Menotti and Fernandez-Vicente, p.45).

Menotti and Fernandez-Vicente note that while people in, mostly Western culture, have the power to choose what they want to listen to and see, creating a self-made world, this freedom is ambivalent due to the mobile phone's “ambivalent nature”. It can partially be seen as a tool for human freedom, yet also as a form of uneasy acquiescence to prevailing forms of social control (Menotti and Fernandez-Vicente, 2013, p.46).

This also teaches us how to see and review images; it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The lack of complexity can reduce ways of seeing to an obvious, superficial way. Digital technology enables the power for constructing a semi-fictional world made of connections. As mentioned, the user is able to make a selection of the voices they like to hear, the news they want to read. In this way, there is the possibility to deal, merely, with the connection in a self-made world and disconnect from the uncontrolled world.

The authors say that when the world consists not so much of a perpetual discovery of new things but merely a repetition of what we have previously chosen, our anxiety expresses the degeneration of a filtered perception. In other words, people feel anxiety when not in touch.

This anxiety does not refer to the aim of being isolated as a unique singular. Rather, this anxiety has come to be recognized as an important element in the desire for imitation that has absorbed much of the modern attention once given to originality. That is, “inclusion-anxiety” motivates many online (contemporary) imagemakers to be “repeat” what has already been approved of at the cost of originality, in order to feel included.

Overall, in order to address the central argument of this research, the focus of this section has been on highlighting how the repetition and self-made factors in the digital landscape, can explain the lack of inspiration and “new ways of seeing” and tendencies of “imitation” over “innovation”, especially when it comes to photography.

2.2 Laclau and Mouffe

2.2.1 Social Hegemony

Assuming that myth is historical speech (as Barthes argues), its history will provide insight to current times. Therefore, if social and political discourse is a type of myth, an historical perspective can reveal how modern myths are formed and their connection to social values. Thus, the following theory, as cited by political theorists Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, will address the research argument by identifying how certain strands of social narratives concerning urban planning in Prague have been marginalised.

The main factors (or the subcomponents of the theory) are “lack of antagonism” and “the influence of modernisation”. The two factors are used to review the rise of

gentrified cities, despite so much resistance and even rebellion against it, using photographs of Žižkov as the source of investigation.

First of all, the two authors argue that left-wing thought today stands at a crossroads. They explain that historical changes have shattered the foundation of past "truths", including traditional analysis and political calculation, the nature of conflicting forces, and the very meaning of leftist struggles and goals (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985, pg. 1).

They argue that a question-mark has fallen more and more heavily over a whole way of conceiving both socialism and the roads that should lead to it (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985, pg. 1). During this confusion, they argue that neoliberal forces have had an important space to take foothold, and tint the whole spectrum of political discourse.

Therefore, in this context, it's important to clarify that gentrification, or the commercialisation, of historical districts and urban development can be associated with neoliberal forces. However, historically speaking, the communist regime also propagated "modernisation" of Žižkov and to some degree urban development, before neoliberal ideology was born.

Thus, the relevance of ideology as causality is not always applicable to this particular discussion of Žižkov. Because the point is, that there has been neglect of certain groups in society and districts of Prague, despite the dominant discourses or ruling ideology. As such, there is more of a historical and sociological conception of this situation than political. It can be conceived that contemporary gentrification is caused by the effects of globalisation and the far-reaching influences of neoliberal discourse. However, in the specific case of Žižkov the urban changes also have to do with the historical remains of the plans of Redevelopment.

However, a relevant point which Laclau and Mouffe explain is that discursive hegemony largely builds on the possibility of antagonism. They say that antagonisms are not objective relations, yet society is constituted around these antagonistic limits (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985, pg. 14).

Consequently, for certain politically tinted discourses to become marginalised it can largely be due to their lack of antagonism against oppositional, or dominant, ones. Antagonism, or rather the lack thereof, is as such about the discrediting of certain ideas.

Nevertheless, this does not imply that the inhabitants of Žižkov have not struggled against commercial forces to preserve the community. The authors are suggesting that in current times, it is more difficult to attain success, be heard, and

receive support.

An example of the difficulty to receive support local community efforts, an autonomous social centre known as *Klinika*, was a social and cultural centre in Žižkov. It started in November 2014, by an occupation of the vacant building of a former lung clinic. After negotiations with state representatives, the initiators of this project were able to remain in the building and operate from there since March 2015, with a contract from the Office for State Representation in Property Matters (ÚZSVM). However, the authorities did not renew the contract in March 2016, leading to the building's occupation against the will of ÚZSVM (Šilingerová, 2016).

The police awaited the outcome of the civil dispute between *Klinika* and the ÚZSVM. In 2016, *Klinika* was mentioned in the Ministry of the Interior's reports on extremism, linking it to the extreme left and the Czech anarchist movement, possibly distorting the image of the leftist tradition in Žižkov.

This example describes how there is an element of “defeat” on behalf of occupants of *Klinika*. In this fashion, the factor of antagonism (or, lack thereof) will be applied to the history of urban developments in Žižkov, as the challenge of reciprocation. As such, this factor can address why more traditional forms of resistance, which have been necessarily anti-authoritarian but not necessarily ideological, have become marginalised.

The “triumph of neoliberalism” is expressed by the authors as the presence of “modernisation”. With the socioeconomic transformations linked to the advent of the information society and the process of globalisation, antagonisms have decreased (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985, pg. 18). As such, the two factors of “modernisation” and “antagonism” are not entirely distinct.

Moreover, gentrification, the process of wealthy people moving into a poorer area and changing it, can be seen as a result of the neoliberal form of economic thinking (Smith, 2002). Though the ideological character of the state has changed in Czechia since the 1980's, local residents in Žižkov continue to protest against authoritarian rule.

Thus, using “modernisation” and “antagonism” as factors, this study will explore, in photographs, how the debate on gentrification in Žižkov became ambiguous, vague or depolarised, leading to intensified urban development.

Overall, the neoliberal impact on urban planning is considered a contributing factor in Prague today, including Žižkov, as it may aid the government's objectives of

"developing" and "modernising" the city. This theory will as such be used to track, in visual data, how neoliberal forms of urbanism has gained legitimacy, if not hegemony.

2.3 Genius Loci

2.3.1 Dwelling and Belonging

The theory of Genius Loci will aim to distinguish how the innate atmosphere of a place (in this case Žižkov), differs from the social narrative which describes it. Particularly, it will be used in order to discuss the dilemmas of using a documentary and autobiographical approach to document a politically charged neighbourhood. Additionally, it will be used to point out the trend of how, today, it has become more common to give more importance to the tools and materials than to the surrounding life world and "atmospheres". In this way, the philosophy and practices of urban development shares a trend with photography.

Genius Loci, a phenomenological theory, can be summarised as the intangible quality of a material place - perceived both physically and spiritually. Christian Norberg-Schulz, architect and theorist, has developed this theory of understanding architecture in concrete, existential terms, following the ideas of Martin Heidegger.

According to Norberg-Schulz it is possible to distinguish an "environment" from its "character". An alternative, more concrete term for environment is place. It is common usage to say that acts and occurrences take place. In fact, it is meaningless to imagine any happening without reference to a locality, the author says. "Place" is evidently a part of existence; because "place" means something more than an abstract location (Norberg-Schulz, p.6).

Character, however, is determined by *how* things are, and gives the following investigation a basis in the concrete phenomena of the everyday-world. According to Norberg-Schulz, it is only in this way possible to fully grasp the genius loci; the "spirit of a place". Genius Loci refers to the concept recognized by the ancients as the "otherness" with which humans must reconcile in order to live harmoniously in a place (Norberg-Schulz, p.10-11).

Furthermore, the author explains that the concept of "dwelling" is used to indicate the total man-place relationship. First, it is needed to distinguish between "space" and "character" to understand this relationship. Norberg-Schultz explains that when a person dwells, he is simultaneously located in space and exposed to a certain environmental

character.

The two psychological functions involved in dwelling, he refers to as “orientation” and “identification”. To gain an existential foothold, a person needs to orient him/herself; where he/she is. Furthermore, it is crucial for one to establish a sense of connection with a place by understanding their own role in relation to it, gaining insight into how they fit into the unique characteristics and qualities of that specific location (Norberg-Schulz, p.19).

A good environmental, spatial plan gives its possessor an important sense of emotional security. Thus, to be lost is the opposite of emotional security; which distinguishes dwelling. Without reducing the importance of orientation, it is needed to stress that dwelling above all presupposes identification with the environment (Norberg-Schulz, p.20).

Though, it is possible to orient oneself without total identification; one is able to get along without feeling “at home”. It is also possible to feel at home in a place without being able to fully orient yourself. However, a true sense of belonging means that both of these psychological functions should be well integrated/developed.

In modern society, however, Norberg-Schulz argues, attention has almost solely been given to the “practical” aspects of orientation, whereas identification has been left to chance. As a result of dwelling, in a psychological sense, it has been substituted by “alienation” (Norberg-Schulz, p.19-21). The author also discusses Prague and argues that Prague’s growth into an industrial capital from the nineteenth century and on has brought about some changes which weaken the general urban structure.

Norberg-Schulz explains that human identity presupposes the identity of a place. Today we start to realise that real freedom presupposes belonging. Dwelling means the need to belong to a concrete place (Norberg-Schulz, p.22). It can thus be asked if certain districts of Prague where the urban structure has “been weakened”, can contribute to a confusing sense of identity.

For these reasons, it is possible to argue that urban photographers are really using the camera as a tool to dwell; to orient themselves; to understand the place and its’ people on a deeper level, as well as showing it for others. This requires tedious, long-term work. There can be an evident sentiment toward the passing of time, in such work. Finally, the table below (Table 1) aims to summarise and clarify which theories, authors and factors have been discussed.

Table 1: Summary of main theories, their authors and factors.

Theory	Author	Factors
Mythologies	Barthes and Bennett & McDougall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Myth as a social value system and institution. ❖ Relation between urban signs and meaning. ❖ Glorification. ❖ Imitation.
Discursive Hegemony	Laclau & Mouffe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Antagonism and modernisation.
Genius Loci	Norberg-Schultz.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Orientation and identification.

Source: Author's own construction.

3. Data and empirical material

A sample of totally 90 images will be used to determine whether a general trend, according to the theories previously discussed, can be identified. The categories of empirical material will firstly include *historical* and qualitative, visual documentation. Secondly, *contemporary* and qualitative visual documentation, both digital and non-digital content will be treated.

The following image-makers have been selected based on the connection to

Žižkov (photos taken in this location). This discussion mainly focuses on the intersection of urbanism and photography in Žižkov, and its relevance to a broader context is limited.

To clarify, the use of empirical data does not aim to definitely connect history and contemporary use of visual media, or to explain definite causation between these two components. The historical analysis will rather suggest contextual elements as to how certain discursive trajectories, when it comes to urban development, in Prague have changed over time. On that note, this paper will treat photographic/visual enablers which explain the changes in this discourse.

In sum, there are two empirical data sections: 1) historical images; including three documentarist photographers, for the first analysis. 2) Contemporary images including both documentarists and images from social media outlets. Below, the material sampled for each of these sections will be addressed:

3.1 Historical images

The historical period will be roughly defined as the years between the early 1970's until 1989; a period of time stretching just under twenty years. In order to concentrate the study, this time period has been selected to start just before the reconstruction plan of Žižkov was confirmed until when these plans were abandoned. This time period has a lot of important events related to city planning and growth, which makes it a good focus for careful study.

The following data has primarily been sampled with reference to location; the three photographers discussed below were active documentarist photographers during the given time period. As such, it is not possible to guarantee whether the following material has been published with any commercial, political or opinion-forming intentions. The purpose is however not to be "objective" but to understand what these photographers were trying to show with their imagery.

Thus, a possible flaw in this approach to sampling is the problem of representation bias. To address this issue, more than two photographers who treat the same time periods have been used. However, the intention with this paper is to illustrate a general pattern, and not to prove any definite causation between events. As such, there may exist historical accounts which can offer other explanations. Therefore, the conclusions drawn may need further investigation to be definitely proved. The sampled sources are listed below, as follows:

3.1.1 Karel Cudlín

Karel Cudlín is a Czech documentary photographer with a humanist approach, who grew up in Žižkov. For this particular study, a sample of 21 analogue, black and white images, which he shot in Žižkov from 1976, will be used. The photographs used in this sample are among the earliest photographs from his extensive career as a photojournalist (Cudlín, 2016). Moreover, the total number of photographs from this body of work make up the total sample used in this study.

Though this photographic series treats the topic of the urban landscape in Žižkov in the late seventies. However, it inevitably includes a portrait of the Roma culture in Prague, as Žižkov used to be a district with a distinct community of Roma people. Though, Cudlín was never focused on the single portrait, or the long term studies. Rather, Cudlín's work revolves around multiple relationships, mainly between children, teenagers and families, as well as the "playful lawlessness" of the place itself.

In this documentation, Cudlín focuses on children, the informal language used by people on the streets, and the intimate and playful events that take place in the homes of local residents. Perhaps the fact that he was young himself when photographing contributed to this angle.

3.1.2 Iren Stehli

Swiss photographer Iren Stehli documented a woman, Libuna Siváková, from the Roma community in, initially, Žižkov between 1974 and 2001. It is an analogue, all black-and-white, intimate portrait, if not an intergenerational story, about the adolescent Libuna growing into an adult. Libuna's story shows life on the margins of Eastern European society under Communism, and after the Velvet Revolution (Stehli, 1989). The sample in this particular study, will include 15 photographs from this total (and extensive) body of work.

The sample of images do not include all of Stehli's photographs from this particular work; it stretches up to almost 400 photographs. To include all of Stehli's content would thus be too large and hence disproportionate in contrast to the remaining samples. Secondly, the selection was made by singling out every 20th photograph, in order to create a relevant yet unbiased sample of 30 photographs.

3.1.3 Jaroslav Kocourek

Jaroslav Kocourek was focused on documenting the urban changes of Žižkov, especially during the initiation of the redevelopment plans. In many cases, he was one of the main photographer to document exactly what was happening during the redevelopment in terms of architecture and urban plans. He shows how the old buildings, if not entire complexes, were collapsing in clouds of smoke during the detonations, the large empty spaces where historical buildings used to stand, as well as the buildings which were planned to be detonated.

This body of work includes 12 relevant images. Due to the similarity of the streets and all the urban debris, some places are not identifiable. Thus, in order to avoid repetition, this sample is a bit smaller than the previous two. Below, in Table 2, a summary of the three samples is provided.

Table 2: Summary of each author used for the analysis of contemporary images.

Document Form	Citation
Photographic publication. Documentation, short-term.	Cudlín, K., (2016). Karel Cudlín: <i>photographs, 1976-2016</i> . Prague: Torst.
Photographic publication. Documentation, long term portraiture.	Stehli, I., (1989). <i>Libuna: A Gypsy's Life in Prague</i> . Second edition. Reprint, Zürich: 2004.
Photographic publication, featured along with works by other Czech photographers. Documentation, short-term.	Rössler, J. (2009). <i>Prague: The City and Its People</i> . Prague: Arbor vitae.

Source: Author's own construction.

3.2 Contemporary images

The contemporary period of analysis will include years from 1990 and onwards; a period of around thirty years. During this time, the plans for redevelopment of Žižkov had been abandoned. However, urban development in Prague has nevertheless continued to

escalate during these years, including in Žižkov.

Both the historical analysis and the contemporary analysis will be conducted according to the same model. This is done in order to detect the most profound deviances between the two periods. Below follows a brief summary of the three image-makers used for this particular sample.

3.2.1 Björn Steintz

German photographer Björn Steintz was documenting Žižkov, in quite a similar way to the previously mentioned photographers, between 1994 and 1996. This sample includes 21 of his black and white, analogue photographs, from his series on Žižkov. The total number of images stretches quite large, however, again, every fifth image has been selected in order to achieve this particular sample.

It is visible that Steintz is following the previous analogue traditions. Generally, Steintz is working short-term and photographing mostly public scenery. He is focused on the everydaylife of Žižkov in the early nineties. Though a few of his photos from this series include people in their homes, there is still some “closeness” lacking compared to for example Cudlín or Stehli. Perhaps, Steintz’s method could be described as something within the genre of “street photography”, more than the journalistic approach of the previous. However, it is a genre where the intimacy with the subject photographed is possibly more of a challenge to achieve.

3.2.2 Klez Brandar

The French photographer Klez Brandar is the most recent “documentarist” discussed. Clearly, he follows the aesthetics of the black-and-white, sometimes analogue tradition, but his photographs stand out from the previous photographers in the way they seem to be produced in more of a “hobbyistic” way, than professional. This sample of 15 photographs are, again, far less than his total body of work from his series on Žižkov. Thus, the principle of choosing every fourth photograph from the series has been applied in order to achieve this sample.

Generally speaking, the photographs are more “voyeuristic”, compared to the work of the previous photographers. It can be due to lack of focus, time spent with subjects, and what the photographer wants to say. Thus, it is not as clear whether or not

this photographer is part of the Žižkov culture. The “gaze” is more present in his images than in, for instance, Steinz’s.

3.2.3 Digital Content (Instagram)

Comparing historical images with social media content from Instagram may not seem necessary at first glance, since the latter is often created as a hobby or for commercial purposes, rather than for journalistic or documentary purposes like the former.

However, there are some significant changes within image-making which likely have an impact on *how* Žižkov is being portrayed. With digitalisation and more accessible photographic devices a more instantly gratifying attitude toward photography has been born. The purpose of this study is to see if, and in what ways, the general discourse and mythology in visual representations of Žižkov has changed, and how platforms such as Instagram can illustrate these changes.

The sample of images from Instagram consists of 12 photographs. It was the 12 most popular public images uploaded on Instagram with the geotag of “Žižkov” on April 3 2023. Thus, this sample does not account for images taken in Žižkov without the geotag, for the most popular images on other dates, nor does it account for those images taken in the area under “private” profiles.

This sample is thought to pick up on the *general* attitude toward publicly showing representations of Žižkov, digitally. It is not assumed that this specific sample will be able to say anything about the totality of images being produced in Žižkov online. Though Instagram is able to show a closer dynamic between the public and the private, the nature of the platform is at its’ foundation commercial. This will also make it difficult to distinguish whether the way Žižkov is portrayed is mostly due to changes in narratives (myth), or due to the commercial orientation of the platform, or if it is simply due to technological advancement.

However, this sample is important in the way it can show a broad pattern, and how it contrasts from the two remaining photographers of this category, which contributes to variation. Below, in Table 3, a summary of the three sampled sources of contemporary images will be listed:

Table 3: Summary of each author used for contemporary analysis.

Category	Citation
Photographic publication (online). Documentation, short-term.	Steinz, B., (1994). Björn Steinz Photography, Available at: < https://bjoern-steinz.com >. (Accessed: December 5 2022).
Photographic publication (online). Documentation, short-term.	Brandar, K., (2022). Kafkadesk Prague Office, Available at: < https://kafkadesk.org/2022/05/25/prague-based-photographer-explres-changing-life-of-zizkov/ >. (Accessed: December 5 2022).
Online/social media	Instagram.

Source: Author's own construction.

4. Method and methodology

This paper is a qualitative case study, using mainly deductive tools, to conduct a historical and contemporary content-analysis. First, historical analysis is a method in coming to an understanding of the past, in particular about why and how events have unfolded. As such, independent variables cannot be manipulated and history can only present observational data, making it difficult to state that “x causes y” (Edwards, 2000, pg. 7). The goal for the historical analysis in this paper is to document a potential relationship or discover an association between two or more variables in the targeted set of cases, without establishing causality (Edwards, 2000, pg. 7).

Secondly, qualitative content analysis has been defined as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of (...) data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”. The term coding refers to “the process of transforming data into a standardised form” (Feldman, 2019, pg. 37-38). In this paper, the content analysis will be used to determine how the given content has been framed with reference to Žižkov.

Below, in Table 4, there is a description of how each theory will be operationalised. The factors of each theory has been broken down further, into “measures”. This will allow an analysis of the sampled content in a relevant fashion.

The issue with these measures is that they may capture elements that are inherent to the photographer's intended message. For instance, in the case of Stehli's photography, the presence of the theme "time" is apparent since a significant portion of her images depict an intergenerational story of family life. However, this system of measures has been conceived to be effective for establishing a general pattern (Feldman, 2019, pg. 37-38). Following, in table 4, there will also be a short, but detailed, description for each measure to illustrate how they have been operationalised.

Table 4: How theories are operationalised in order to analyse data.

Theory	Factors	Measures
Mythologies; Barthes and Bennett & McDougall.	Myth as a social value system and institution.	1.1.1 Respecting photography as a tradition but also the ability to say something new, or have a personal way of seeing.
	Relation between urban signs and meaning.	1.2.1 Political awareness and intention: displays of urban change as a form of “protest” or “acceptance”. 1.2.2 Photos which display individualism; portraits without much context or interaction.

	Glorification.	<p>1.3.1 Depiction of social setting; is it showing a sense of “underground”?</p> <p>1.3.2 The image of passion: intelligible representations of moral situations which are usually private.</p>
	Imitation.	1.4.1 Photographs which favour material (technique) over content.
Discursive Hegemony, Laclau & Mouffe.	Antagonism and modernisation.	<p>2.1.1 Photographs depicting an explicit critique of political or sociopolitical forces.</p> <p>2.1.2 Photos which accept urban development or show little awareness that it might be a problem.</p>
Genius Loci, Norberg-Schultz.	Orientation and identification.	3.1.1 Images relating to time, growing, changes.

Source: Author's own construction.

Below follows a brief explanation for each measure described above, in order to provide understanding for how each individual photograph has been processed and assessed according to the given theory.

Measure 1.1.1: Respecting photography as a tradition but also the ability to say something new, or have a personal way of seeing, indicates that the speaking subject

can use the “lingual” code of photography to distinguish themselves from the *general institution of language*. For example, photographs which carry a strong narrative, intention and purpose will be considered to score in this measure.

Measure 1.2.1: The cultural code of gentrification can temporarily fix the relationship between urban change and meanings. The apparent meaning, e.g. whether , is a result of cultural conditioning, or habit, leading to cultural encodings appearing concealed. Images which display a clear sense of “critique” of toward gentrification will be considered. This measure can be tricky to distinguish from Measure 2.1.1 (Antagonism).

Measure 1.2.2: On the flipside, photographs which seem naive or unaware of gentrification or other political circumstances by singling out the photographic subjects from their contexts will be considered.

Measure 1.3.1: This measure aims to show how glorification can be supported through depiction of social setting. Does the photograph romanticise a sense of “underground”? Themes such as criminality, subcultures, bohemian lifestyles, will be searched for.

Measure 1.3.2: Glorification also entails the image of passion, whether or not that passion is genuine. Images which display intelligible representation of moral situations which are usually private; a sense of suffering, defeat, and/or justice will be accounted for. Also, photographs which display topics of privacy or intimacy; for example in peoples homes, daily acts which usually would be private and so on, will be included.

Measure 1.4.1: Photographs which imitate display an obsession with materialism, where the tools are prioritised over life, the form over content and where medium is the message. It will be analysing photographs in terms of providing *information* rather than technical or material quality. Images which are obviously repetitive will also be considered.

Measure 2.1.1: This measure mostly relates to “antagonism”. As the notion of antagonism has been challenging to come through in political discourse, photographs which display strong political awareness and aims to protect the community from

dominant political forces will be considered. This measure can be tricky to distinguish from Measure 2.1.1 (Relation between urban signs and meaning).

Measure 2.1.2: This measure relates to modernisation. Photographs which, contrary to the previous measure, display means to encourage urban development at the cost of authenticity. Photographs which do not display any themes of “underground”, or political awareness.

Measure 3.1.1: Images relating to time, growing, changes; showing not just the wish to orient oneself but knowing the areas, knowing the streets; the photographers understanding that they are working with time and gaining existential foothold. Will be used to see how urban photographers to orient themselves in a given location, with a sensitivity toward the passing of time and with the aim to “preserve”.

5. Analysis

In the following section, first the results of the historical analysis will be presented. Secondly, the results of the contemporary analysis will be shown. The reason for a historical and contemporary comparison of images is conducted, is to address the basic line of argumentation of this paper. I.e. how the “social myth” of Žižkov does not fully comply with the socioeconomic situation happening there now.

Though the “gentrification” of the area is generally recognized, the social narrative of Žižkov still seems to hang on to its “underground” image. An historical comparison is thought to be able to address how, and in what ways, the myth in visual sources has or has not changed over time.

Moreover, the analysis suggests tht with digitalisation and more accessible photographic devices it seems that people have turned away from long term photographic projects and instead to document moment to moment, with less intention or political agenda.

5.1 Historical analysis

For the following section, the historical analysis, there have been a total of 51 images sampled. All measures have been calculated for each photograph individually: for each image and for each factor. As such, the images are repeated for each factor (see 8. Appendix, and 8.1 Historical Analysis). The pattern generally shows that the photographs were politically insightful, with strong intentions. It does not show much indication of imitation or repetition of themes or content. Three images will be discussed in detail in this section, used as specific, salient examples of how the theory was operationalised. Below, in Table 5, a compilation of the results from the operationalisation of the theory on the historical data is shown:

Table 5: Percentage and number of sampled data units (photographs) and how they relate to the factors* of historical samples.

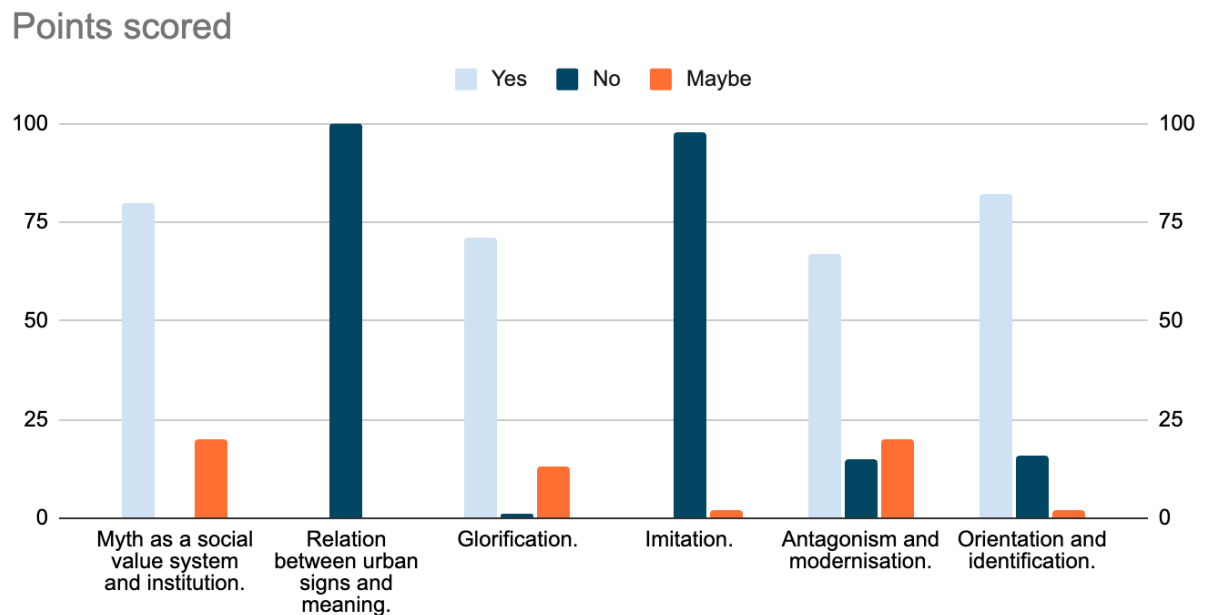
Factor	% Yes	% Maybe	% No
Myth as a social value system and institution.	80%	20%	0%
Relation between urban signs and meaning.	0%	0%	100%
Glorification.	71%	13%	1%
Imitation.	0%	2%	98%
Antagonism and modernisation.	67%	15%	20%

Orientation and identification.	82%	2%	16%
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*The same photograph can occur in more than one factor. **Source:** Author's own construction.

Moreover, diagram 1, below, visualises the proportional results of Table 5 in order to present the data in relation to each other.

Diagram 1: Visualisation of Table 5, percentage score of each factor.



Source: Author's own construction.

From the numbers provided above, it is possible to say that the factor “relations between signs” and “imitation” dominantly score “no” in the historical sample. This means, first, that none of the historical images encourage “urban development”. It is thus possible to claim that the photographers of the historical period *do not* take an actively positive attitude toward the urban changes of Žižkov.

Secondly, the photographs do not display individualism, i.e. it would have been mostly portraits, or singling out photographic subjects, without much context or

interaction. Instead, almost all of these photos provide rich, contextual information especially with focus on human relations and interactions. Also, the content of the photographs is not compromised by prioritizing material or technical bravado (imitation).

Moreover, it is possible to detect that “photography as means to express personal thought” as well as “orientation and identification” scored dominantly yes. Hence, it can



Image 4: Libuna Sivakova's bedside table, by Iren Stehli.

be claimed that the photographs of this sample, are respecting photography as a tradition but also include new, or personal ways, of seeing and telling. In other words, the photographers exercise a form of authorship and have an intention behind their projects.

The photographs relate to time, growing, and life changes (orientation and identification). One salient example of this, is an image from Stehli (see Image 4). She introduces the book about Libuna with a close-up photograph of what might be a bedside table. On this tabletop, there is a neatly framed photograph of Libuna herself and her husband. Beside this photograph is a cheap, plastic bedside clock, larger than the framed photo it is standing beside. Being the first photograph (and one of the largest prints) in the book, it points to the intergenerational aspect; how life passes on, passes down, with time. It is about preservation, about photography as a long-term and steady endeavour. Despite the images being full of life, eventful and rich in content, the main approach which Stehli consistently is searching for in her images is the ordinary; everyday life, the small changes that with time become significant.

Stehli's work, in contrast to for instance Cudlín's, is more of a close-up portrait; a long-term study. Stehli portrays the



Image 5: Children playing in bed, by Karel Cudlín.

poverty-stricken life and disorderly settings of big families and sub-cultural neighborhoods (like Žižkov) with a somewhat serious approach. She depicts a family that was compelled to leave Žižkov because of redevelopment, which is an example of the impact of early "gentrification" on the Roma community. Unlike Cudlín, who focuses on children and playful events (e.g. image 5), Stehli showcases Žižkov from an adult's perspective, exploring issues such as housing, family responsibilities, and crime.



Image 7: Detonation of building complex in Žižkov, facing Vltkov Hill. By Jaroslav Kocourek.

Like Stehli, the nature of Kocureks' work can be thought of as preservation, too. His work is entirely dedicated to show the process of how Žižkov was coming to be demolished, how buildings and spaces were being detonated (see image 7). Kocureks' approach was more directed toward the changes of the

landscape, the urban changes, not so much individual citizens. However, it is still obvious from his photographs that he is not taking a positive approach toward the urban changes, the photographs are dramatic. For this reason, Kocurek was also the one photographer who scored highest in "antagonism and modernisation"; being antagonistic and critical towards the discourse around modernisation. The remaining photographers were not as clear on this point.

Among the three photographers, Cudlín's work received the most "yes" in terms of portraying Žižkov in a glorified manner. Some of his photographs may support the romanticised notion of Žižkov as an underground, unruly, and "free" place. Overall, there are clear patterns in the sample provided, with little room for confusion or uncertainty, as a minority of the total sample scored "maybe".

The three images discussed in this section were used as salient examples from the operationalisation of the theory.

5.2 Contemporary Analysis

For the following section, the contemporary analysis, there have been a total of 51 images sampled. All measures have been calculated for each photograph individually: for each image and for each factor. As such, the images are repeated for each factor (see 8. Appendix, and 8.2 Contemporary Analysis). The pattern generally shows that the photographs were ambiguous and “instantly gratifying”. They also show a general pattern of imitation or repetition in terms of content and method. Three images will be discussed in detail in this section, used as specific, salient examples of how the theory was operationalised. Below, in Table 5, a compilation of the results from the operationalisation of the theory on the historical data is shown:

Table 6: Percentage and number of sampled data units (photographs) and how they relate to the factors* of historical samples.

Factor	% Yes	% Maybe	% No
Myth as a social value system and institution.	6%	31%	57%
.Relation between urban signs and meaning.	22%	8%	65%
Glorification.	10%	14%	40%
Imitation.	35%	16%	41%

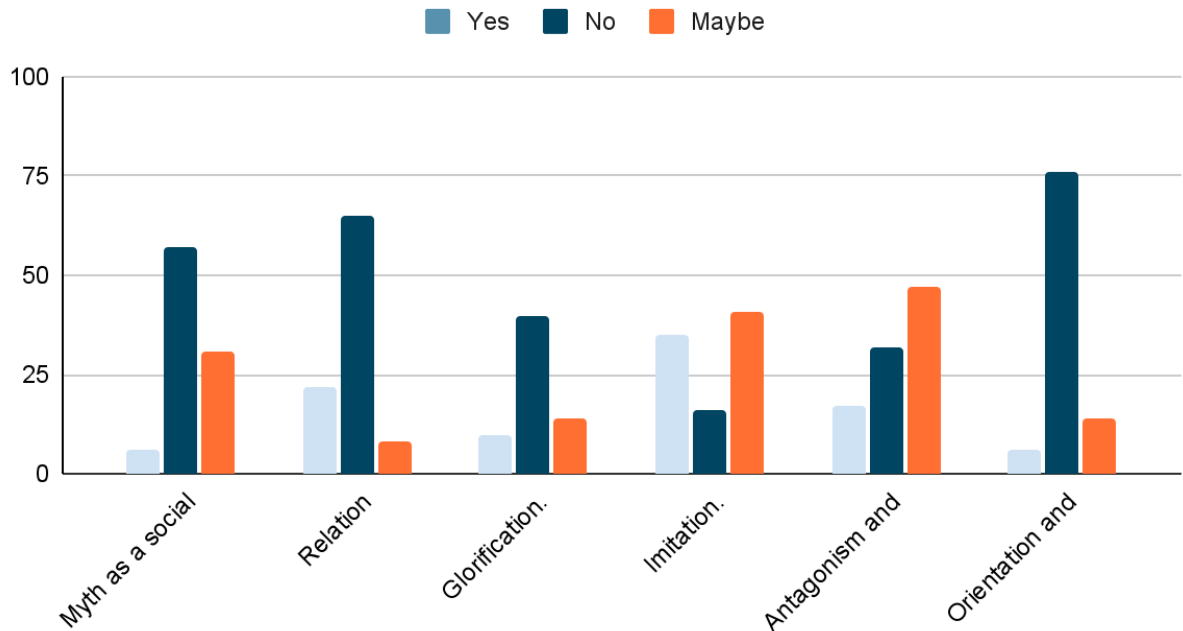
Antagonism and modernisation.	17%	47%	32%
Orientation and identification.	6%	14%	76%

*The same photograph can occur in more than one factor. **Source:** Author’s own construction.

Moreover, diagram 2, below, visualises the proportional results of Table 6 in order to present the data in relation to each other.

Diagram 2: Visualisation of Table 6, percentage score of each factor.

Points scored



Source: Author's own construction.

From the numbers provided in the analysis of contemporary photographs, it is possible to see how “maybe” makes up a much larger portion in the contemporary sample, than in

the historical. As such, the first point which is observed is that these contemporary photographs do not have as clear of an intention, or goal, as the historical ones. Particularly in “orientation and identification” and “imitation”. Out of the three samples, Steinz was the photographer who achieved most on “maybe”. In particular when it comes to “antagonism and modernisation” as well as “myth as a social value system and institutione”. This series was shot just a few years after 1989;



Image 9: Woman at community gathering, Žižkov, by Björn Steinz.

a few years into the transition to a market economy. Perhaps the signs of antagonism are vague simply because this was during a time of “political vacuum”.

It is following the same themes as previously, but somehow it's lacking the raw approach with people, which in particular Stehli and Cudlín captured. It seems that *relationships* with people do not seem to stand at the centre, even if people are often portrayed (see Image 9).

Moreover, it is possible to see that though “imitation” also scored alot of “maybe”, it was the factor which achieved the most “yes” out of all. This means, generally, that the contemporary images are not providing as much content or information, but rather echo the visual aspects and basic concepts of how the area has already been photographed. Out of the three sample groups, Klez Brandar was the one who gained “yes” on all his photographs with reference to imitation.

In this sample of Brandars’ work, there are not really any historical components included and the architecture and urban landscape is rarely, if not never, shown. There is a strong focus on individuals, not so much on Žižkov as a community; the interactions and the ordinary life of people. It is possible to see mostly the faces of people who happen to be on the streets; we never know if they are residents or just happen to be passers-by.

As compared to the historical period, Žižkov changed more rapidly over time during the period of which this sample was selected. Due to the higher turnover of residents during this time, it is more difficult for the photographer to establish close



Image 8: Woman in Žižkov, by Klez Brandar.

connections with people, compared to earlier times. This is evident in Brandar's work, which also may be attributed to his broad focus of documenting all of Žižkov rather than a specific aspect or storyline within the area (see image 8).

Brandar was also the photographer who mostly lacked glorification in his images; “the image of passion”. Despite aiming

to contribute in the documentary genre, there is still room for improvement in terms of storytelling. In other words, there is an opportunity to enhance the information and visual narrative. This could lead to a more engaging and enriched experience for the viewer, with a greater depth of information and aesthetic diversity.

Furthermore, in many cases Brandar is shooting photographs with a digital camera and imitating the black and white, grainy look which analogue photographs naturally have (though some appear to be analogue also). There is, not just repetition in terms of content, but imitation of the historical photo series. It can possibly leave the viewer wondering where the typical atmosphere of Žižkov is.

Secondly, we can see how there were many “no’s” that also achieved a larger portion of the contemporary analysis, in particular “myth as a social value system and institution”, “relation between signs” and “antagonism and modernisation”.

The sample collected from Instagram scored “no” in most cases (see image 9). However, it scored high in “yes” when it came to glorification, more than the remaining two photographers. As discussed in previous sections, it is possible to argue that the

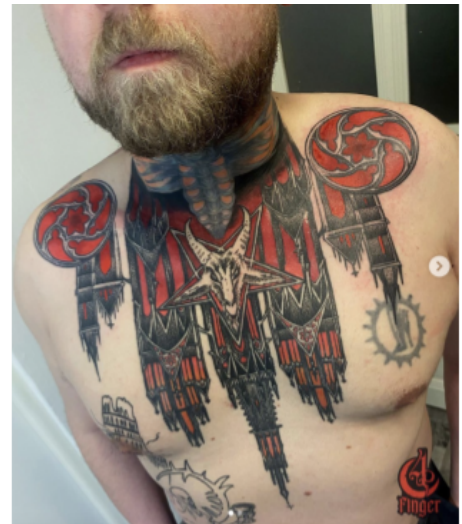


Image 9: Sampled image from Instagram under the geotag Žižkov.

historical photographs and documents support the romantic idea of the unruly, “subcultural” Žižkov. These images suggest an underground atmosphere, more than Steinz or Brandar.

Interestingly, despite the heavily commercial nature of the platform (Instagram) many images from this sample showcase more glorification, for example intimate and private situations which both Steinz or Brandar are lacking in their imagery.

In sum, It is not the case that Žižkov has become “less political” or that it’s politically less significant; now more than ever is it important to show how gentrified forces are co-existing with older values. But contemporary images, at least from the samples provided in this case, do not show much sense of antagonism or political awareness.

5.3 Comparison

The goal of this paper is to explore how the current socio-economic situation of the Žižkov area challenges the “social myth” often associated with it. This particular section aims to comment on the general differences between the historical and contemporary samples. It does, however, not aim to establish any definite correlations, or causality between mentioned events. It is instead used to discuss possible cultural connections. This intention to establish overarching patterns is largely influenced by the intricate ideological complexities of the region.

For example, it can be seen as a human right to affordable and safe housing. This paper does not contest the legitimate need to ensure citizens any safe living space, which the government permits through urban development. However, this discussion aims to touch on the aspect of how the development of Žižkov is leading to the loss of an important landmark of Prague, as well as unaffordable housing, at the cost of “safe living spaces”, without outmost respect to its’ Genius Loci.

It is possible to argue that Žižkov appears to be the bearer of a long documentary tradition within photography. However, the tradition has not merely served a function of “preserving” a historical landscape, what really seeps through all these photographs, first and foremost, is a sense of perseverance; the pressure of time. However, because of the nature of the local residents, the topics also include “exclusion”, “subcultures”, “minorities”, and so on. Even the topic of “identity” is at the heart of these photographs.

The Roma community, the leading figures of the historical sample, has the

technological access to voice their concerns themselves today, compared to one or two decades ago when this was not possible. To take on the role as documentary storyteller and voice a minority groups' concern in today's conditions, can easily turn into a voyeuristic if not exploitative way of documenting.

This issue touches upon a longstanding challenge in the realm of documentary photography, sometimes referred to as "white man's burden", as mentioned earlier in this paper. In essence, it suggests that in order to photograph someone who is experiencing hardship or disadvantage, the photographer must be in a similar position themselves; otherwise, it could be viewed as unethical.

In the past, the purpose of documentary photography was to show what was "different than the regular", however, today it is necessary to photograph those "like yourself", in some ways. In contemporary times we are thus faced with a dilemma within this genre.

The demographics of Žižkov have undergone changes, and the working-class population's dominance has decreased. Presently, class divisions exist, and a significant portion of the population belonging to the "higher classes" are foreign expats, tourists, or working professionals. As the current population has a considerable "foreign" aspect, the sense of disintegration among people persists, albeit for different reasons. Although the contrasting interests of individuals are apparent, the common thread uniting the community of Žižkov over the history of time, is a feeling of disconnection from the general public.

Quite clearly, there exists a discrepancy in today's imagery of Žižkov and the way in which it is spoken of. Images today seem to represent a "clean", more generic perspective, with a lot of distance to their subjects. As opposed to the extremely intimate photographic studies of the seventies and eighties, which clearly explored the life of unruly, "underground" life. As well in popular speech, Žižkov is the mythological figurehead of a grungy, punky, underground culture rimmed with pubs, drug addicts; a "shithole").

The fact that the documentary tradition is somewhat dying out is a broad question which cannot be answered with the scope of this paper. However, what is seen in the comparison, be due to several different things. Firstly, the general conception of "documentary photography" in this day and age can be debated. Photography being more accessible contributes to this. Secondly, though Žižkov is changing rapidly, the

official notion of “demolition” is not present. However, to persevere in this area, a documentarist approach would be necessary as it is still rapidly changing.

In sum, the main differences in the contemporary sample, from the historical, can be boiled down to five main points, according to the data discussed. First, is the point of accessibility. The digital landscape, including platforms such as Instagram, has made documentary photography more accessible to the masses. With the smartphone, anyone can capture and share images that tell a story, making it easier for people to document their surroundings and share their perspectives on important social issues, or anything else.

Secondly, the general cultures’ (as influenced by the increasing use of social media) focus on visual content has also led to a rise in the popularity of visual storytelling, where photographers use images to tell a story rather than in words. This has resulted in a shift towards a higher volume of imagery in the realm of documentary photography.

Thirdly, the digital landscape, especially Instagram’s, influence in the democratisation of the medium has also provided a platform for amateur photographers to share their work alongside professionals. This has created more opportunities for emerging photographers to gain exposure and recognition for their work.

Fourth, short attention spans and “instantly gratifying” images occur since Instagram’s algorithm prioritises short, attention-grabbing content, which has influenced the way photographers approach their work now. As a result, photographers, or people in general, may focus more on capturing striking images, rather than more nuanced, complex storytelling.

Lastly, the marketing and branding structures of Instagram has also changed the way documentary photographers approach their careers. Many photographers use Instagram as a marketing tool to promote their work and build their brand, which can lead to more commercial opportunities but may also create pressure to produce content that is visually appealing and marketable. As such, it is possible to argue that these factors have caused contemporary documentary and urban photography to become more vague, ambiguous and weakened its’ possibility for political influence. Thus, enabling gentrification to take further foothold.

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined to what extent contemporary social value systems (in this case, the social process of gentrification) have the ability to create modern myth. Specifically, it analyses Žižkov; a district in the Czech capital, Prague. The basic line of argumentation is that the “social myth” of Žižkov does not fully comply with the socioeconomic situation happening there now. Even though the process of “gentrification” of the area is generally recognized and acknowledged, the social narrative of Žižkov still seems to hang on to its “underground” image.

In order to trace the differences in socioeconomic and narrative changes in relation to Žižkov, this case study has taken the main empirical base in historical and contemporary documentation in the form of photography. Moreover, it was built on a qualitative approach by including a theoretical framework based on mythological and hegemonic discursive structures. This was then applied to a content analysis. As such, the data sources included historical accounts of existing, qualitative documentation by historically active photographers, as well as contemporary image-makers in Žižkov.

The findings of this study show that is not the case that Žižkov has become “less political” or that it’s politically less significant than during the plans of redevelopment in the 1970’s; now more than ever is it important to show how the forces of gentrification are coexisting with older values, such as the “underground” and “unruly” lifestyles. However, contemporary images, at least from the samples provided in this case, do not show much sense of antagonism or political awareness as they used to.

Finally, this research does not aim to claim definite causation between historical events and contemporary discourse. However, it suggests that the contemporary, political discourse concerning urban development in Žižkov has become rather ambiguous, which may have helped to facilitate the gentrification of the area.

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