

'We'd Hoped That the Flat Would Be Ours One Day': The Fight for Fair Privatisation in the Moje Písnice Initiative*

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Abstract: In this article, we analyse the conditions behind the formation of the tenant initiative Moje Písnice, which existed in Prague between 2016 and 2020. In the theoretical part, we explain the concepts of urban movements and tenant movements in Central and Eastern Europe and emphasise the role of everyday life and emotions in the genesis of a collective actor. We use qualitative methodology based on an analysis of 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews with members and one supporter of the Moje Písnice Initiative. This initiative provides an illustration of the formation of collective actors in the urban space in Central and Eastern Europe. We focus specifically on the historical and social conditions behind the initiative's development and the emergence of a shared identity and shared housing expectations and the disappointment resulting from unfulfilled hopes. Other important factors that we discuss are the intersubjectivity of emotions and the emancipatory potential of the initiative's organisational structure, which enabled the participation of people with no prior experience with activism. We also focus on the public's sense of disillusionment with civic engagement and with the political system in general since 1989. This research contributes to the study of tenant movements in postsocialist countries, which are often an overlooked actor in one of the most important processes in the post-1989 transformation – privatisation. In contrast to previous research, we focus on the role of shared emotions and the subjective experience of historical processes.

Keywords: urban movements, tenant movements, privatisation, emotions, CEE

Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review, 2023, Vol. 59, No. 2: 197–219

<https://doi.org/10.13060/csr.2023.023>

* The research was supported within the project of the Student Grant Competition of the University of Ostrava: SGS04/FSS/2021. The outcome was supported within the project of the Specific University Research SVV: Social Innovation, Social Work and Marginalised Groups. The English translation was funded by the Cooperatio SOAS 2022 programme.

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Introduction

Housing in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is a social segment significantly affected by the postsocialist transformation to a market economy (Lux & Mikeszová, 2012; Pixová & Sládek, 2016). During this period, many institutional reforms took place based on democratization, the empowerment of local governments in decision-making (decentralization of power), the privatization of public assets, and deregulation (Sýkora & Bouzarovski, 2012; Tosics, 2019). The processes of privatization and deregulation represent the fundamental political and economic tendencies of the transition period, which still evoke different reflections in relation to housing. Some authors emphasize the positive aspects of privatization in CEE as associated with the acquisition of property rights (Stanilov 2007a). Others describe consequences in the form of unaffordability and housing quality deterioration (Ivanička & Ivanička, 2007; Pixová, 2020), the emergence of power structures based on political entrepreneurship on the borders of legality (Klíma, 2015), or the rise of the poverty industry (Kupka et al., 2021). According to other authors (e.g., Sýkora, 2009), these processes have made space for widening disparities between residents of different socioeconomic groups, ethnic segregation, rapid growth in real estate prices, and a weakening of the welfare state's capacity to dampen inequalities.

The CEE housing sector was later affected by global processes, especially following the 2008 financial crisis. The latter is associated with the emergence of large investment companies oriented towards the provision of rental housing, deepening tenant precarization, housing insecurity, and the overall commodification of housing's social function (Lombard, 2021; Muñoz, 2018; Soaita, 2022; Waldron, 2021). Critical urban geographers have referred to these phenomena with the term 'housing crisis' (e.g., Madden & Marcuse, 2016), which became freely used in Czech public discourse in reference to increasing housing unaffordability in the aftermath of the financial crisis. In this respect, housing in the CEE environment has started to be more frequently conceptualized as an investment (the financialization of housing) (Černá et al., 2020), which has also influenced the behavior of individual, state, and private actors.

In response to the effects of the global financial crisis, research on housing has also seen an increased interest in urban activism and struggles for the right to the city and housing (Muñoz, 2018; Soaita, 2022). In this regard, many authors have pointed to the specific nature of urban activism in CEE and the diversity of its forms, which do not conform to the frameworks of social movements shaped predominantly in Western literature (Jacobsson, 2015a). Thus, to understand urban movements in CEE, where the civic sphere is characterized by low trust in formal institutions and by the rarity of spectacular and ideological forms of activism, it is important to reanalyze the emergence of the political subject and new solidarity relations (Bitušíková, 2015; Mihaylova, 2004; Williams & Horodnic, 2015).

In the research presented in this article, we focus on the emergence of a specific tenants' initiative, Moje Písnice, and the historical anchoring of this process. We came to the case through our interest in the issue of the right to housing and the city. In the Czech environment, this is a relatively unique case of tenant self-organization. The formation of a collective actor in this case can be observed

against the background of postsocialist transformation. Our interest and the nature of the case led us to seek a deeper understanding of it from a research perspective. Tenants' initiatives in the Czech context are under-researched, and those that do deal with them are usually media outlets or activists.

However, not only is wider interest in the Czech context of the topic lacking, foreign research in the CEE has predominantly focused on the forms and tactics of tenant movement organization, as we point out in the first chapter of the theoretical section. In this context, Jacobsson and Korolczuk (2019) emphasize that research should address the emergence of the political actor in regional urban activism. Thus, we elaborate the topic of collective actor formation in housing activism in the second theoretical chapter. Our analysis is through the lens of everyday relationships (Jacobsson & Korolczuk, 2019; Soaita, 2022), and, in this regard, it emphasizes the importance of emotions in mobilization. We see emotions both in their historical context and as a framework insufficiently analyzed by prior research on urban movements in the CEE, including the Czech context. In the study, we put forward the research question: *How was the collective urban (tenants) actor (the Moje Písnice initiative) shaped in the context of the postsocialist transformation privatization process?*

In the empirical part of the article, we present an analysis of a group of tenants living in the Písnice housing estate in Prague, united in the Moje Písnice initiative (hereafter referred to as 'the initiative'). The initiative was established as a reaction to privatization processes whereby the housing estate was transferred to the private sphere. Privatization to existing tenants, usually corporate flats to start with, was a common practice in the Czech environment. In some cases, however, large housing stock was privatized into the hands of private investment companies, which led to a deterioration of rental conditions and provoked strong reactions from the original tenants (Černá et al., 2020). This was the case in Písnice. Therefore, examining the initiative not only provides insight into the formation of a collective actor in the urban activism environment of CEE but also offers important testimony about the experience of these transformation privatization processes from the perspective of the tenants themselves.

Urban social movements in Central and Eastern Europe

The concept of *urban social movements* was created in response to the insufficient attention urban sociology gave to the phenomenon of urban unrest. Earlier research (e.g., Castells, 1983) conceptualized urban social movements in terms of their ability to influence oppressive social structures, but later research speaks of reduced influence, differentiation, fragmentation, and the ability of activists to influence urban decision-making patterns (Mayer, 2006; Mayer & Boudreau, 2012; Pickvance, 2003). Urban movements seek to influence the physical space, social relations, and political processes in the city (Pruijt, 2007). They are diverse, but all assert a *right to the city* in the sense of access to resources (social services, housing) and the transformation of one's identity through the transformation of the urban environment (Lefebvre, 1968). By their very nature, urban movements oppose those who derive added value from the process of urbanization (develop-

ers and investors) (Harvey, 2008), thereby attempting to articulate non-capitalist meanings of urban space.

In the West, urban movements emerged as a response to the crisis of Fordism in the 1960s. In the CEE, these represent a response to a specific form of postsocialist transformation (Domaradzka 2015; Hamel, 2014; Mayer, 2007). Specifically, they respond to the transformation of the city as a result of urban neoliberalization and to the emergence of new inequalities in the city (Jacobsson, 2015b; Petrović & Backović, 2020; Pixová & Sládek, 2016; Polanska, 2010; Stanilov, 2007b). The development of democratic institutions in CEE has lagged behind market mechanisms, leading to a democratic deficit at the local level, a loss of influence among local governments over urban space, unrestricted power of the private sector, corruption, an interconnection between economic and political elites and limited opportunities for activism (Cook, 2010; Horák, 2007; Jacobsson, 2015a; Pixová, 2018, 2020; Sýkora & Bouzarovski 2012; Temelová, 2009). Pixová (2018) calls these changes postsocialist shock therapy. In this context, urban spatial plans (a fundamental tool against deregulated urban development) have served to facilitate private interests and economic development and have been subject to numerous changes¹. Activists in CEE thus act within a rather closed political opportunity structure in the 'institutionally incoherent context of post-socialist transformation and a non-transparent legal environment' (Pixová, 2020, pp. 19–20). In the postsocialist environment, there are uncultivated and unregulated conflicts as well as the mutual delegitimization of activists and politicians. Coalitions between different actors then play a significant role in this environment (Horák, 2007; Clément, 2015; Pixová, 2018; Polanska, 2015; Polanska & Piotrowski, 2015).

Other authors point to the diversity of activism in CEE, which takes the form of professional and formal organizations, informal initiatives organized from below, or flexible organizational forms that adapt their form according to circumstances (Bitušíková, 2015; Petrović, 2020). Diversity is also manifested in the fact that activism is not necessarily political, often taking on the ethos of the civic sphere and nonpolitical politics (Jacobsson, 2015a), or is locally focused even without being a response to global processes per se (Pixová, 2018). Researchers of urban movements in CEE have pointed to the methodological necessity of going beyond the analysis of protest events or networks of advocacy organizations (Císař, 2008, 2013; Jacobsson, 2015a; Jacobsson & Korolczuk 2019) to focus on other kinds of political action. Urban activists often position their organization in opposition to the institutional and organizational forms of the civic sphere (NGOs), turning seemingly nonpolitical activities into practices of active citizenship (e.g., free yoga classes), living the politics of the everyday and building relationships based on solidarity (Jacobsson, 2015b; Jacobsson & Korolczuk, 2019; Polanska, 2020).

¹ For example, in 2013, Arnika recorded more than two thousand changes to the Prague urban plan (Pixová, 2020, p. 42).

Tenants' movements in CEE

Tenants' movements are a specific form of housing struggle in the CEE. In a way, they thus constitute a precondition for struggles for the city because, as Muñoz (2018) points out, the central element of being in the city is the home, without which the struggle for the city is problematic or impossible. Research on tenant initiatives in CEE settings has focused on forms of organization, tactics, and the formation of alliances. Tenants' organizations have taken various forms in the CEE setting, ranging from self-management committees seeking to privatize, renovate and build new housing for tenants (Láng-Pickvance & Manning, 1997; Pickvance, 1994, 1996) to community-based organizations and housing partnerships that sought to protect neighborhoods (e.g., against illegal construction) or maintain housing (Aidukaite, 2015). In terms of forming alliances, tenant movements in CEE have features of transactional movements (seeking to build relationships with other organizations) but are also based on self-organization (Polanska, 2015). Unlike NGOs, they often lack financial support from abroad and operate on the basis of smaller cells and pragmatic interests (Polanska). In the context of the Polish movement, Polanska points to the tactical importance of building alliances (e.g., between tenants and squatters), the role of intermediaries with high social and cultural capital, the asymmetrical relationship between media and activists, and the importance of strategic alliances with politicians (Jeziarska & Polanska, 2018; Polanska, 2015; Polanska & Piotrowski, 2015). She also concludes that consolidated, inflexible, ideological, and identitarian positions can be an obstacle to building alliances. In terms of tactics, tenants' movements often interact with the institutional system rather than attempting to confront it directly (Polanska, 2015). Examples include members of the Prague 1 Tenants' Association who entered politics and attempted to redistribute money from privatized property or protest against rent deregulation (Pixová, 2020, pp. 95–96).

The ambivalent role of housing privatization is essential for tenants' movements in CEE. In the Western literature, privatization is seen as a negative phenomenon accompanying the neoliberalization of Western cities in the 1980s. It is associated with deregulation, the slimming of the welfare state, the ascendancy of market logics, the weakening of urban democratic institutions, and the commodification of cities (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Mayer, 2007, 2016; Peck et al., 2013). Movements fighting for the right to the city are therefore associated with the struggle against privatization, not for it. However, as the above research shows, the struggle for privatization may instead be the articulation of the right to housing and the reason for civic mobilization in CEE. This is based on a different historical context, where a large number of people had the opportunity to privatize the state or company-owned housing they occupied before the revolution. In this way, they secured a home at a time when state support for housing was weakening, and the deregulation of the market, along with the commodification of the entire segment, limited access to housing. We approach the framing of these struggles for privatization with the concepts of the right to the city and right to housing after the following reflection. On the one hand, privatization is an individualizing process of property acquisition, so we can hardly speak of collective consumption (e.g., public housing or transportation) as sought by

urban movements (Castells, 1983). On the other hand, we must keep in mind that the right to the city and to housing does not necessarily challenge small private owners. The key criterion is not private ownership per se but rent extraction at the expense of those without ownership. Over time, this leads to monopolization, domination by large investment companies, and the displacement of the middle and lower classes out of the city (which was also the case for several of our informants in Písnice). Karl Marx (1959), whose work is the basis for right-to-the-city theorists like Lefebvre and Harvey, among others, drew attention to this difference between the small private land owner and the large corporation that seeks to derive rent from the land. It is also important to mention that in the CEE, one of the functions of housing is ontological security, which plays a major role in times of political and economic turbulence (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998; Gibas, 2015). In this respect, and in the context of the postsocialist transition, privatization in the hands of tenants or tenants' organizations (cooperatives or owners' associations) may represent a specific form of struggle for the right to housing and against the commodification of housing in the hands of investment companies or transnational funds oriented towards rental yields.

Formation of tenants' initiatives in CEE transformations

The formation of tenants' initiatives is an under-researched topic of collective actor formation in conditions associated with rather low levels of engagement. Housing precarization itself is associated with a reduced ability among tenants to fight for the right to the city and be politically active (Muñoz, 2018; Waldron, 2021). The 1990s' transformation (privatization and commodification of housing, individualization, increasing inequalities) combined with a rejection of civic participation (Aidukaite, 2015), especially among socially vulnerable groups (Pickvance, 2001). However, some (Lombard, 2021; Soaita, 2022) have noted that resistance emerges even in the unequal and precarious conditions of rental housing, though it can be less spectacular and ideological and thus may escape the attention of researchers. As Jacobsson and Korolczuk (2019) point out, cities create spaces where people organize themselves towards the transformation of the private to the public, but in a way that is closer to everyday life. Thus, the collective identity that is subject to social movement research is formed not so much by breaking out of a routine, for example, through shared participation in protest or other outward-looking activities (Gamson, 1991), or by defining oneself against an oppositional group of actors but by sharing everyday activities and concerns (Flesher Fominaya, 2010). The small acts and interactions of everyday life can be crucial for the first steps towards activism in the CEE context, which is in many ways specific. Public space is depoliticized. There is distrust of others in the civic sector as well as of spectacular collective actions. Open protest can carry risks (Bitušiková, 2015; Jacobsson & Korolczuk, 2019; Mihaylova, 2004; Williams & Horodnic, 2015). Jacobsson and Korolczuk (2019) note that so-called common spaces are important for engaging in urban activism in CEE, where people can discuss their concerns, where their identities are formed, and which, as a result, are also places for the development of collective activism. Such places can be public services in neighborhoods, sidewalks,

houses, or other spaces where the personal mixes with the public. In this context, Bradley (2014) points to what is called localism in the construction of democratic activist structures, where inherently nonhierarchical and everyday ties between tenants or neighbors, initially based on everyday solidarity (lending tools, sharing news, caring for the common areas of the house, etc.), can serve as a basis for organizing tenant initiatives in moments of threat, such as eviction.

In addition to the process of privatization and the building of everyday local ties, we analyze the importance of emotions in the *Moje Písnice* initiative. Emotions play a key role in political participation research (Adams, 2003; Della Porta & Giugni, 2013; Summers-Effler, 2002) and in the overall intersubjective process of (political) meaning-making (Durnová, 2018). We continue this with a sociological approach that understands emotions as social and cultural practices. Postsocialist transformation has been accompanied by euphoria and hope but also disillusionment, nostalgia, anger, and resentment (see Svašek, 2006a). Transformation in the housing sphere is not only about political and economic change but also about emotional processes that can lead to different kinds of behavior. Ownership is transformed into an object with which desire and satisfaction are connected. This social meaning of ownership is disseminated through privatization, restitution, state support for mortgages, and advertising. Restitution is not only an economic process but an emotional drama both for owners who consider it the return of a moral debt and for tenants who have invested work, time, and lived part of their lives in the housing (Zerilli, 2006). Emotions, meanwhile, are not just an individual phenomenon but take the form of 'particular emotional discourses and performances,' bodily experiences (especially in connection to territory) from which personal and social identity is derived, as research on the dynamics of property relations in the Czech-German borderlands shows (Svašek, 2006b, p. 110). Some authors (e.g., Fullilove, 2016; Valli, 2021) place emotional experience at the center of issues of gentrification and displacement. They point to the impact of indirect forms of housing displacement or precarization on tenant perceptions of the meaning in life and mental health. Emotions and their sharing in the context of urban transformation are then, they argue (Fullilove; Valli), central to the possibilities of resistance to different forms of displacement. In this context, Polanska (2017) in her study of Polish tenants, points to the connection between the process of collective organization and the transformation of negative emotions of shame and guilt into justified anger or hope and empowerment. It is the transformation of negative emotions into positive experiences of hope and agency that is related to increased participation in activism and the ability to overcome the challenges that activism brings, as research in the field of social movements has pointed out (Flesher Fominaya, 2010).

Methodology

Given the exploratory nature of the research problem dealing with the phenomenon of collective actor formation as well as the clearly defined case of privatization of the *Písnice* housing estate, we chose a qualitative research strategy to achieve the research objective. Thus, the research also used qualitative methods

of data collection, namely semi-structured interviews, which we supplemented with our own observations while visiting the housing estate and with informal interviews among residents and supporters of the initiative. We chose the Písnice housing estate as our research context based on our civic interest in the area of housing rights (see positionality below) and, thus, familiarity with the case. We wanted to understand the whole case primarily from the position of its actors—the residents—and thus contribute to the knowledge of housing activism in the Czech Republic. At the same time, however, the Moje Písnice initiative triggered our research interest because it is a unique case in the Czech context: that of an urban movement that fought over the form of privatization. We also chose Písnice because the struggle occurred relatively recently (between 2016 and 2020), and it was possible to access active members and their memories. In the case of Písnice, it was also rental housing owned by one entity, which reduced the complexity and bias. The main criteria for the selection of informants were mainly their status as a long-term resident of the housing estate (more than fifteen years), as well as active involvement in the Moje Písnice initiative or, in the case of solidarity actors, active support for its efforts. We used a snowballing method to select informants. We first approached key figures of the initiative, who then helped us to contact other active tenants who supported the initiative and participated in its activities. In this process, we also sought some heterogeneity of the data so that people who were not at the very core of the initiative would be included. The research sample consisted of 11 tenants (6 men and five women) and one supporter who was also a local politician. The size of the research sample was guided by the principle of saturation, whereby we continually analyzed the data collected, asking whether we were encountering new meanings and categories or whether saturation was occurring. The interviews took place in different settings chosen by the participants themselves (at home, at work, but also online due to the COVID-19 pandemic). In the interviews, we not only focused on the privatization period but also on the overall experience of living on the estate in order to understand the broader context of collective organization formation, people's relationship to place, and, thus, possible historical contexts. Central to the interviews were questions focused on the formation of the initiative in the context of the estate privatization, the subjective experience of the initiative's operation, and the subsequent reflection upon privatization's impacts and activism.

In the research we also dealt with our own positionality and the positionality of informants. Our own role in the research was linked to our relationship with the academic institution but also to our other activities promoting the right to housing. It was this latter role that helped us establish trust among our first contacts. However, it also raised concerns about how the information would be handled and what it would be used for, particularly in the context of perceived housing insecurity in the future. Issues of trust and the meaning of the research were therefore key. Some members of the initiative expressed fatigue at being interviewed by the media, feeling that their testimony was no longer useful once the 'fight is over.' We responded to these concerns with sensibility, recognizing the informants' feelings of injustice caused by the sale of the estate to a private company. In order to better understand the respondents, we often described the other activities in which we were involved, not only as academics but also as

housing activists (e.g., in the organization Re-set). We pointed to our interconnectedness with the civic sector and to the opportunity to use the results and described experiences to support community organizing in other neighborhoods facing displacement. For some informants, it was important to hear what institution was funding the research and how and where the research data would be used (e.g., that it would be anonymized, not used in the media, etc.).

We approached data collection and analysis in the spirit of thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017) and constructivist grounded theory (Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2012). In practice, this meant that we continuously coded the interviews from the outset, creating preliminary categories upon which we further refined the research question and the interview itself. We carried out these steps independently and repeatedly compared the analytical categories to increase the validity of the findings. However, in the analysis, we did not strictly follow all the steps recommended by grounded theory but rather kept to describing key categories and themes, which we linked to a meaningful narrative that replicated some of the chronological events associated with the history of the settlement.

We proceeded with the analysis by first having each team member go through the first two or three transcribed interviews and create a set of codes and preliminary categories. After this first round, we grouped the codes within several chronological stages (pre-privatization, first privatization period, intermediate period, second privatization, and post-privatization period) and further refined these periods and thematic units. In order to focus the analysis, we first concentrated on the period of the second privatization, which was associated with the Moje Písnice initiative. Gradually, however, it became apparent that the themes emerging in the earlier stages of the informants' narratives play a significant role in interpreting the emergence of the collective actor during the period of struggle over the type of privatization (i.e., between 2016 and 2020). We therefore began to work with them outside the chronological stages. Contrary to the classic grounded theory approach, we also, rather than using a purely inductive method, discussed the emerging categories with the literature, bringing into focus the emotional side of initiative formation and the historical context, which we felt represented the most interesting part of the analysis. Through several rounds of reading, coding, clustering and discussion with the literature and our teammates, we settled on key categories that illuminate the process of collective actor formation, the nature of the organization itself and its democratic and emancipatory potential, and the effects of organizing and privatization on the lived experiences of the initiative members. For the purposes of this article, we thus present several key thematic units that map the formation of the collective actor in the postsocialist transformation privatization process:

- sociohistorical circumstances of collective actor formation,
- the role of emotional intersubjectivity,
- organizational genesis and its emancipatory role, and
- the change in perception and experience and consequent demobilization.

Research results

The empirical part of the text answers the research question, which covers the main aspects of the Moje Písnice initiative's emergence and the experience of participating in it. For a better understanding of the whole formation process of the initiative and the individual phenomena under study, we have arranged the text chronologically and included factual notes on the history of the settlement and the development of the privatization. The first part is devoted to the activating moments and preconditions for the formation of the initiative (shared identity, expectations, and the sense of injustice over not fulfilling them). The second part deals with the emancipatory potential of the organization. The final section is devoted to the implications not only of the mobilization and organization but also of the privatization.

Prerequisites for collective actor formation: social and historical conditions

Shared identity and shared everyday life

The Písnice housing estate project was created in the second half of the 1970s. As part of the collectivizing principle, future residents, then employees of state enterprises (Military Construction, Gasworks, Ministry of Fuel and Energy, etc.) participated in the construction of the housing estate (Rychlíková, 2021). This principle was characteristic of the social composition of housing estates under socialism, where residents were often placed according to a common employer. On its basis, not only the socioeconomic but also the age composition of the settlement was rather homogeneous. Thus, the residents of the Písnice housing estate shared similar life milestones, including, for example, the upbringing of children. The key conditions for the provision of housing consisted of involvement in the construction of the housing estate and a commitment to stay for the next 10 years in the enterprise: 'All those who got the flats had to work some work hours on the estate, then be with the enterprise for 10 years' (r5). Living together on a day-to-day basis fed the emergence of a shared identity on the estate. Respondents identify it as significant that they were in a similar life situation at the time of moving in ('young newlyweds') and shared certain characteristics with others that they perceived positively ('perspective,' 'all decent, pleasant people,' 'normal Czech middle class'). Thus, they associate the neighborhood community mainly with the existence of neighborhood solidarity and mutual recognition: 'We celebrated, for example, children's birthdays together. We used to go to make bonfires, roast sausages. Yeah, we just knew each other here. You could turn to anyone.' (r3) As one respondent demonstrates, shared identity was also reinforced by the absence of strong social inequalities (either based on work or ethnicity): 'The interesting thing here was the composition of the people. There were some officials of the Ministry of Industry, but next door, there was the family of a Roma digger who worked in some energy company, and he actually got a bigger apartment than my husband as an engineer. There was no distinction here.'

The infrastructure of the estate and its proximity to nature reinforced the collective identity by providing a shared narrative of a past beautiful and undisturbed life:

It was nice to live there. You see your work every day. You know how it was. (r8)

It was very nice for the children— closed, no cars going there, only locals parked there. So we were very happy. That Modřanská gorge, there was somewhere to go to experience nature. (r10)

At the same time, the infrastructure of the housing estate provided space for intergenerational gatherings (e.g., a swimming pool where parents took their children to swim) (Hoření Samec & Lehečka, 2020, p. 31). Overall, the socialist housing policy and its associated conditions contributed in some way to the formation of neighborhood ties on the estate, which later played a role in the initiative's creation.

The social psychologists Haslam and Reicher (2012) describe one of the basic preconditions for the emergence of resistance as a group's belief that a shared identity is subject to unfair oppression. In the case of Písnice, as in the case of many urban initiatives in CEE, the sense of injustice was not derived from ideology but rather from everyday pragmatic concerns (housing) and a particular historical moment that brought new possibilities. The experienced social norm in the 1990s declared the right of existing tenants to buy back apartments and supported shared *legitimate expectations*: 'Almost everyone in the Czech Republic had the opportunity to buy back those company apartments.' (r3) The desire to 'live,' as informants often said, was an individual but shared pragmatic goal, determined by a new social norm, which then united most estate residents beyond informal neighborhood ties: 'What united us was that we wanted to get those flats as our own property... not to pay rent ... There was no ideology there.' (r1) Privatization into the hands of existing tenants was also to guarantee continuity and preservation of the principle of the right to housing (for some tenants) in the new market environment: 'When I left the Military Construction [company], which broke up in '93, we had been told that they would actually leave those flats to us.' (r12) According to respondents, these promises were repeated after the transfer of the estate to the semi-state company Czech Energy Companies (ČEZ) in the 1990s, when specific preparations for the estate transfer began to take place.

Shared sense of injustice

A key moment that increased the sense of injustice occurred around 2003 when the long-prepared privatization into the hands of housing cooperatives was to take place: 'We received an offer from ČEZ to buy the flats, but with the proviso that they would not sell us individual flats, but that we needed to form logical and logistical units—co-ops.' (r5) The tenants collected funds, selling their cars or cottages or taking loans to reach the basic deposit in the cooperative. However,

the sale was abandoned at the last minute when ČEZ withdrew from it, justifying this with claims of economic disadvantages in the transaction and possible accusations by the shareholders of failing to comply with the principle of a good manager. At this point, the original agreement on the right to housing had been delegitimized as a right to buy based on entry conditions from pre-1989 housing discourse. A completely new discourse determined by purely market criteria prevailed, which gave privatization a different form.

The delegitimization of the agreement and the consequences of the failed privatization have created a *shared sense of injustice* among tenants:

It was an injustice. My husband felt that he had to be with the company he got the flat from, that he had to be there for 10 years. We were actually robbed. All those people were entitled to those flats. (r11)

They describe this experience as 'daunting,' 'demotivating,' 'causing uncertainty.' Some people moved out, but part of the estate's inhabitants unsuccessfully sued ČEZ, 'freezing' the situation for many years. Informants cited parallels with the Ostravsko-karvinské doly (OKD) flats case² and perceived a deep influence of corporate interests on the judiciary and politics in the failed privatization and unsuccessful trials. Concrete experience of unequal status between ordinary citizens and big capital then functions as one of the emotional triggers of anger and powerlessness, strongly embedded in the dynamics of post-Soviet development:

We were excited to go to court. We were sure that we would win. When we lost, we found out that we had no chance against ČEZ in this republic. It was so depressing, you know. And then it, actually, the waters closed, and it was, it was quiet. Nothing happened. (r10)

Thus, even prior to the formation of the Moje Písnice initiative, resentment and frustration had been building among the estate's inhabitants based on a sense of unfair oppression and a shared pragmatic interest in living there. But, at the same time, it was not just about this interest. The preconditions for later mobilization, derived from the strength of a neighborhood community that shared everyday life, is an identification with place and the experience of the good life there.

From informal relationships to civic organization

The role of intersubjectivity in the emergence of a collective actor

An unexpected move by ČEZ mobilized the tenants anew in 2016. It definitively invalidated the justified expectations associated with housing and flat privati-

² For more information about the case, see the chapter 'Financialization of Housing. When a Home Becomes an Investment' (in orig. *Financializace bydlení. Když se z domova stává investice*) (Černá et al., 2020) in the book *Beyond Capital* (in orig. *Za hranice kapitálu*).

zaion. All respondents identify the receipt of a formal letter as a key moment that caused a 'shock.' The letter announced that the estate was to be sold to an investment company. At this point, it was no longer 'just' a question of whether the situation would remain the same (rent from ČEZ) or improve (privatization into housing associations) but whether the situation would worsen (increased rents, changed conditions for the use of the flats). In particular, it was confirmation as to the invalidity of the agreements and expectations linked to the history of the lives of the long-term residents on the site: 'We hoped that the flat would be ours one day.' (r11) The residents faced the threat of indirect eviction through rent increases and unfavorable contracts if a private investment company came in as the new owner. According to Twigg-Molecey (2014) and Desmond and Shollenberger (2015), displacement can also take a subtle, indirect form, where forced removal occurs, not through outright rent termination or evictions but through a fundamental change in conditions that make current or future living in a place more difficult (rent increases, public service changes, environmental degradation, etc.). In this respect, eviction represents a significant change in power relations that makes it impossible to continue to identify with a place to live (living in a precarious tenancy) and to associate one's future with it. Informants associated this moment with a mixture of negative emotions (confusion, anger), deepening the already present sense of injustice: 'The neighbor who worked at Military Construction built the housing estate with his own hands, and now, suddenly, he was about to find out that he built the whole thing for some developers and that he would be paying pretty high rent for it.' (r3)

The emergence of the initiative was associated with a rapid transformation of initially negative emotions into a sense of shared hope. This was related to one of the initiative's first actions, which, in response to the letter, was to file a lawsuit against ČEZ, seeking to challenge its ownership of the housing estate due to ambiguities in the privatization from state-owned enterprises to the semi-state-owned ČEZ in the 1990s. Following the lawsuit, the first bidder (the investment company of the financier Pavol Krúpa) withdrew from the planned purchase. This moment raised the hope of many that it was possible to change the situation through collective organizing: 'The best thing and the biggest hope was when Krupa, who wanted to buy the real estate, withdrew because the inhabitants lodged a protest against it. That was such a hopeful moment' (r4), 'a kind of euphoria, a fight for something, for something of ours, something that brought us quite close together' (r7). It reinforced a collective determination to resist: 'Five hundred to a thousand people came together, and they were saying they couldn't treat us like this.' (r8) The initiative thus became a kind of emotional infrastructure that allowed for the expression of strong emotions: 'You learn that our position is not happy but, at the same time, something is happening. You have the opportunity to express yourself, to show your opinion, and one even shouts or chants sometimes.' (r5) This gave it more legitimacy and motivated members to engage instead of finding individual solutions or locking themselves into pre-existing networks at the level of individual entrances in their block of flats.

Transformation from individual to collective emotions

According to some authors (Adams, 2003; Della Porta & Giugni, 2013; Summers-Effler, 2002), emotions are an important dimension of activist engagement. However, as shown in the residents' stories, they are not in and of themselves the only prerequisite for collectively mobilizing tenants in urban space. Residents can also experience emotions as paralyzing: 'I didn't know what to do at all' (r10) and can lead to alienation or powerlessness for many, as was also evident in the section of the estate that remained unengaged and passive:

People used to be angry when they were walking. When I used to meet them, when I would come back from work, and they would come back, they were all furious, angry, powerless. (r6)

They felt insecure. Some used to want things to go well, but they didn't get involved. I don't know if they were afraid. (r11)

Closer neighborhood ties at the level of individual entrances into a block of flats, which were connected to everyday life and could thus provide a functional platform for sharing emotions, played an important role in the transformation of individual emotions into collective ones. Individual entrances, compared to the whole community of the estate, are typically characterized by a lower degree of anonymity and alienation. Neighbors usually know each other. Moreover, in the case under study, the networks of relationships within the entrances went beyond a 'mere' informal neighborhood community since having already been forced to form cooperatives during the failed privatization in 2003. Thus, the initial informal group of neighbors from one entrance organized (using leaflets, Facebook groups, posters) a meeting of residents from the whole estate where previously unorganized residents could meet. This moment represented a milestone, enabling the emergence of a collective subject that transcended the original communities of individual entrances: 'I actually did walk through the flats in my entrance that day. There were four of us, so we went down to the carriage house. ... And, somehow, we started discussing it... (r2).

Meetings, both at the level of an individual entrance into a block of flats and especially of the whole housing estate, served as a platform for translating individual emotions of discontent into an organized form of collective action. The emergence of the collective subject thus took place as an intersubjective process, whereby initially individual negative emotions were transformed through their sharing into collective feelings of hope and new possibilities, which continued to reinforce the importance of the emerging collective initiative: 'I wouldn't have known what to do myself, but by the fact that they had a plan, there was still a sense of hope that it could still be done.' (r4) Respondent r4 mentioned that leaders played an important role in transforming emotions, managing to turn the tenants' initial skepticism into hope through speeches and alternative plans:

I think they were very good, the speakers. I think the atmosphere of our tenants was sceptical, but they managed to give us that hope, through those speeches that we would give it, that we would stand up to it, that we would make it happen.

Emancipatory potential of collective organizing

The structure of the initiative consisted of a core group of the most active members of the initiative (leaders), active informants in the entrances (confidants), active members outside the core, working groups with rotating roles, and a passive majority. The democratic potential of the structure was evident in the desire for equal distribution of information across the estate and in the manner decisions were made. The different steps of the initiative were discussed in meetings of the core group. Information was then disseminated further around the estate through the trustees in the entrances. The dissemination of information itself can be considered a democratization process because representatives of ČEZ and CIB Group, a.s., (CIB; the new bidder for the housing estate) had previously used the concealment of information as a tool of domination (e.g., concealing the ownership structure of CIB, not informing the public about an upcoming competition deadline, etc.).

The emancipatory potential of democratic structures and decision-making

Although the initiative was built on voting, it always tried to find a consensus or at least a two-thirds majority to avoid demotivating members. The initiative had a mandate to make decisions ‘for the estate,’ but a strong democratic ethos was evident from the accounts of active members, who sought to gain and then reflect the diverse perspectives of key neighborhood units (entrances) in decisions:

When we got it all sorted out, we all went to our entrances. We talked to people. We found out how they saw it. We gave our views. We always tried to... not just push for my own view... and then at that meeting, we voted according to what the people in our entrance wanted. (r1)

Thus, the leaders sustained the democratic process while mobilizing others by awakening hope among a skeptical population.

Participation in the structure of the initiative, regardless of the outcome of its activity, had an emancipatory effect, which respondents associated with gaining self-confidence in advocating for their own interests and losing their fear of expressing their opinions. These skills contradicted the learned attitudes imprinted upon them during the previous regime, when it was not customary to speak out against something publicly:

At the beginning, I thought I was doing something unauthorized [protesting in parliament]—the way we were brought up, our generation, that you can’t protest and you can’t say anything and you can’t disagree. So, at first, we didn’t, but then gradually, we got used to it. Then we wore whistles. (r12)

The collective organization and its democratic form helped to create a space where the individual could emancipate themselves through the possibility of ‘being heard’: ‘You have the opportunity to express yourself, to show your opinion, and sometimes, you even shout or chant.’ (r5)

Emancipation by acquiring new skills

Members of the initiative gradually learned new practical things, which led to autonomy and independence from outside help:

When we did demonstrations, when we were in Wenceslas Square, we got ourselves some power stations, we had our own speakers, we had all the equipment, we made posters, we bought everything, and we did it ourselves. Yeah, nobody helped us in that respect. (r7)

Respondent r2 placed more emphasis on the principles of organization, which he associated with a proactive approach, as opposed to the protest events, which he perceived as more defensive:

For us, it was more about the meetings that we had on the housing estate, passing on the information, the procedure and the coordination. Okay, I'm going to demonstrate, but that's getting defensive rather than us trying to somehow actively move the initiative forward.

Respondents also developed speaking and organizing skills as well as the ability to deal with politicians, motivate people to get involved and write petitions and letters. Some participants talked about acquiring skills not inherent to them previously: 'I'm an introvert ... When the TV journalists first appeared, jeez, I didn't know what I was supposed to do. I just couldn't speak with journalists ... Towards the end, I had no problem shouting at everyone on the megaphone at the demonstration.' (r2) The experience of being involved in the initiative and learning skills are positive consequences of collective organizing, considering the initially apolitical neighborhood ties. For some respondents, it functioned as an important experience that also fostered subsequent civic activism, as mentioned by respondent r5:

It awakened in me ... active engagement in the sense that when something is happening around me, I'm not going to sit at home and go and voice my opinion. I live a short distance away, on the other side of the Modřanská gorge, and when there is a building, a town hall, etc., ... I ... have no problem speaking my opinion out loud.

Transformation of experience and subsequent demobilization

As a result of the response (and, often, the absence of one) to the residents' initiative among the state apparatus and politicians, many spoke of being awoken from their naivety and losing confidence in representative democracy, which until then had not needed to be questioned. This attitude stemmed both from repeated experience with high politics evoking skepticism but also from a growing belief in the ties between politics and business. Another source of skepticism was experience with the courts, which, in the optics of the residents, tended to

favor the investment firm and ČEZ, discouraging residents from seeking justice: 'The judge said to think carefully if they wanted to pay court fees' (r8); 'The judge betrayed them. At that moment, they put it down too' (r6). From particularistic concerns (trying to secure a stable home), the initiative members thus moved on to a more general criticism of the system: 'I think it opened our eyes' (r10); 'The more you go through the political palate, the more you find out that these politicians don't care about these citizens at all' (r5). At the same time, they got the feeling that resistance was beyond their capacity: 'At the beginning, it was not difficult. We were all running around like crazy. We wanted to do something, and we believed that we would succeed. But the longer it took, the worse it got.' (r9) The initiative's members link the end of the organizing process to the feeling of powerlessness that came when the estate was sold to CIB despite continued efforts. CIB featured as an opaque and untrustworthy entity for the tenants. The lack of success in convincing the courts or senior politicians as to the plight of the existing tenants brought disempowerment: 'Well, it was bitter, in that you wanted to fight for something but you are powerless.' (r12)

The initiative fought for privatization that was supposed to increase the housing security of the estate residents. Instead, the privatization increased their insecurity and precarization. Most respondents mentioned disenchantment with democratic mechanisms and that the market-motivated privatization had a demobilizing effect which led to individual solutions (moving elsewhere, acquiring individual housing via mortgages): 'One must take care of oneself and must not trust anyone.' (r11) The individualization of solutions and moving to find a new home led to the breakdown of a community built on joint effort and long-term communal living on the estate: 'I had an accident two or three years ago, and the family was just so spread out, I wouldn't have survived without those neighbors. But today, today I wouldn't survive because those neighbors aren't here.' (r3) After a series of unsuccessful attempts to privatize the estate into their own hands and sell the estate to a new owner, the initiative became inactive.

Discussion and conclusion

In the article, we presented several important factors that tenants and members of the Moje Písnice initiative associated with the emergence of the tenants' initiative. By doing this, we propose an answer to a key question around the emergence of a collective actor in the context of postsocialist transformation.

Collective organization in the researched initiative stemmed from the common life on the estate and the historical context of housing, which contributed to the formation of a shared identity and the sense of injustice from unmet expectations. The specific conditions involved in the formation of the collective actor (the tenants' initiative) were related to socialist housing policy and the emotions associated with privatization. The cohabitation of people of the same cohort in the socialist state and the guarantees related to housing security contributed to the initiative's organization given the relationships of people with similar life stories. House construction, work, housing, and leisure time with children was shared in everyday life. The organization of practical matters and connections built of this

in the different entrances in the block of flats proved essential. The redirection of attention towards activism based on the everyday has also been indicated by previous research (Bradley, 2014; Jacobsson & Korolczuk, 2019; Soaita, 2022). Overall, these findings point to the importance of neighborhood community development as a prerequisite for civic participation as well as its social and material implications.

The second important finding is the role of intersubjective emotions in the emergence of the tenants' initiative. Intersubjectivity worked in the context of existing ties, where emotions could be transformed into collective and shared experiences and not isolated into a multitude of individual responses. The initial enthusiasm of initiative members and their subsequent disillusionment with activism and political institutions was evident in the studied case. In this respect, the case reflects the overall emotional mood of the transition period in CEE. In relation to the transition, Svašek (2006a, p. 2) states, 'In many parts of the region the tumultuous political and economic developments have generated strong feelings, ranging from hope and euphoria to disappointment, envy, disillusionment, sorrow, loneliness and hatred.' Emotions that people otherwise experienced individually or only as shared helplessness were, in this case, also manifested collectively and transformed into hope. However, emotional contexts are not a frequent subject of investigation in the context of transition in CEE. As Svašek (2006a) puts it, this may be related to the established way of discussing the transformation. The latter is an economic and political issue rather than an emotional one. The research on tenant movements in CEE does not focus on emotions, but rather on the forms or tactics of the movement. Yet, it is tenant communities that have experienced one of the most significant economic transformations and changes in property rights in recent history (Tosics, 2019)—postsocialist privatization. In our research, we show that emotions, such as euphoria, hope, and shock, are not just shared, but reflect a society-wide mood and have mobilizing potential, making them crucial to the politics of urban movements. Furthermore, activist organization provides an emotional infrastructure where anger that is otherwise unwelcome in society or where there are established depoliticized ways of expressing it can be shared. The initiative's case also shows that emotions can have both a mobilizing and a demobilizing effect, particularly in relation to the experience of making demands towards a political system operating within a decision-making structure that is closed to citizens. The growing skepticism concerning the delegitimization of the state's previous commitments and the legitimate expectations of initiative members is again shared and reflects the gradual disillusionment with the transformation present in CEE (Svašek, 2006a). This may lead to a preference for individual rather than collective solutions and a general distrust of the political and judicial system, which may also be a precondition for the election of anti-system parties or resignation to the current political system as it is.

With regard to the initiative's formation, we pointed out the emancipatory potential of its structure. The success or failure of urban movements in CEE can be assessed not only in terms of the goals achieved but also in terms of the emancipatory potential of direct participation in the organization and experience and experimentation with self-organized democratic forms. Active citizens who have

no experience with direct participation in activist or civic initiatives or in sharing responsibilities can, through participation, acquire skills and tools for future activities. Respondents raised the issue of external support, which they lacked in the form of an experienced community organizer or more experienced activists, even from the more radical elements of the left movement, who could help facilitate some parts of the process: 'We were figuring it out on our own... there was no one there.' (r3) This led to the need to quickly acquire skills through self-help without external support. In other words, although the desired goal (of obtaining housing) was not achieved, the experience of political organizing was in some cases transformative for members in and of itself. This experience—for many tenants, the first in their lives—may thus have represented an emancipatory moment, especially in the context of a closed opportunity structure with limited access to democratic processes at the city level. On the other hand, given the final outcome of the struggle, which was unsuccessful, the democratic organization of the initiative was also subject to criticism by informants. Some interviewees saw it as an opportunity for ČEZ and CIB to do what they wanted and not look to anyone. Respondents claimed that the time commitment needed till did not necessarily guarantee the best tactical decisions. Some of them retrospectively assessed the protest tactics as not radical enough due to having respected voices that preferred to wait and act 'politely': 'The only mistake, [which] we really should have done, was taking a paving stone and going and chopping something up.' (r11)

Despite criticism of the democratic organization form and the lack of external support to accelerate the acquisition of necessary skills, we can observe in the *Moje Písnice* initiative that urban activism rose in importance among those who are not typical activists by incubating active citizenship. This could strengthen the democratic potential of (postsocialist) society. Previous research on tenant movements ignores this important component of urban activism— individual emancipation—as well as other components, such as striving for equal and fair distribution of information among members, democratic voting, and learning new skills.

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