

10 | KRČ – TWO SETTLEMENTS IN THE PAST, MANY FACES TODAY

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Krč is an interesting district because it is a mosaic of housing development. The oldest buildings are located close to Kunratický brook, and they were originally part of two former villages – Horní (Upper) and Dolní (Lower) Krč (Votrubec, 1965). Both villages were typical Prague periphery lands with only hundreds of inhabitants. Until 1922, when the area was joined to Greater Prague, both villages were in different districts. While Horní Krč belonged to Královské Vinohrady district, Dolní Krč was a part of Nusle district. Besides these two compact villages there were two smaller settlements, Jalové Dvory and Nové Dvory, two homesteads, Ryšánka a Habrovka, and the still-standing U Labutě inn located by the road between Vienna and Prague. One of the major developments in the area was the construction of a brewery in the first half of the 20th century. However, the construction of the Prague inner motorway ring's southern part, called Jižní spojka, in 1985, caused the demolition of both old villages, excluding a couple of houses on the slopes of Pankrác plain. Even the former relief was reshaped. The school building, as well as a part of the brewery, disappeared, and other central buildings like St. Anna chapel or Sokol gymnasium were isolated next to the elevated motorway.



Figure 10.1: Dolní Krč – a village square with a chapel in 1978 before Jižní spojka construction.
Source: Berný (2013).

Interwar Krč was characterised by the expansion of family housing and villa localities. Such development on fields and farmers' land was typical for Prague's peripheries (e.g. neighbouring Braník or Podolí) in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. The result was a change in perception of Krč as a "city part with numerous housing colonies" (Král 1946; 107). Krč's family housing localities now fill the southern slope of Pankrác plain from the most western part at the border with Braník around the Ryšánka homestead to eastern parts neighbouring with the Kačerov metro station. Empty land plots were filled up by family houses after the Second World War.

A second locality prepared for family housing construction lies south of the old Krč railway station. This project represents the garden city concept, which was used in several other localities in Prague during the interwar period. A garden city is characterised as an independent unit far away from a noisy and dirty metropolis. This resembles today's suburban living. In Krč, three geometric complexes made by family housing and villas were designed. One realisation was done close to Šimsa's sanatorium on the fields of Tomáš Welz, who was a local landowner and proprietor of a chateau in Krč. Although the garden city was never completed, one of its hallmarks, a concentric street pattern, was established. This urbanistic concept involved public services located in the middle of several rings of family houses. All houses were proposed in a unified style on land plots with an area of 800 m² (Sečkář, 2013). However, individualised construction created a mosaic of architectural styles and unusual decorative elements.



Figure 10.2: Unfinished garden city near Krč railway station.

Photo: Jiří Nemeškal (2020).

Despite having good train and bus transport connections to Prague, housing demand in the garden city was lower than expected. The main reasons were safety concerns due to non-paved and non-illuminated roads leading to the garden city, low capacity, and long distances to schools, markets, shops and institutions (Sečkář, 2013). Construction plans were finally ended by Masaryk's Houses in 1928, with some houses being completed in parts of the planned garden city.

The next era of construction in Krč was defined by collective houses, beginning in 1930s and lasting until the 1980s. Today we can see housing estates of different ages, sizes and styles in Krč. The oldest one is called Zelená liška, followed by Herálecká and Antala Staška. The largest housing estates are Pankrác, Krč and Jalodvorská.

The very first housing estate drafts can be found in the Regulation plan of Prague in 1927, i.e. five years after Krč joined Prague (Helikarová, 2015). The first houses were finished five years after the regulation plan. Functionalistic ideas of the then architects and urban planners were strongly influenced by left-wing stances. Collective living was introduced as a solution to a housing crisis and an increase of people living in slums/temporary houses. Locating housing estates on the periphery was an obvious and favourable choice. The nearby slum colony of 100 houses on an area of 3.5 hectares surrounded by vegetable gardens and fields was a perfect combination for a new symmetric quarter. Poor transport connections to Prague were overcome by extended tram rails in 1930.

The new housing estate was uncommon to the city. Houses were not shaped to enclosed blocks; their layout plan was rectangular or L-shaped. Buildings followed a straight line, were built from bricks and were fenced in. They were designed with collective spaces and amenities (e.g. laundry or courtyard balconies) serving as a floor. All the other collective elements designed by architect Antonín Černý were not realised. Typically, small flats of area 36-52 m² were designated for the poorest inhabitants of Prague (Helikarová, 2015). The planned urbanistic concept was suspended by the Second World War, but a few years after the war, two long rows of houses at Budějovická street were added as part of the two-year state economic plan (1947-1948).



Figure 10.3: *Zelená liška housing estate completed by Herálecká housing estate.*

Source: Archwars (2016).

The 1950s brought an innovative house construction technology. Prefabricated concrete blocks and panels could be made in a factory, and final assembling could be done in the place of construction. Using prefabrication technology, the Zelená liška housing estate was modified with the addition of nine newly finished G 40¹ type houses and one G 55 house. The houses were built in a socialist realism architectural style: facades were decorated by pilasters, decorative fencing at floor windows, ledges or house symbols. Despite recent renovations, all those elements are still visible and are in contrast with pre-war buildings. Basements in all the houses were planned as air-raid shelters, which illustrates the Cold War atmosphere during 1950s. Following construction of Antala Staška housing estate delimited by Antala Staška and Olbrachtova streets in 1957 had used the similar five floor houses G40 and G57 deprived of social realism decorative elements. The housing estate was supplemented by 21 three-storey brick houses that completed the previous block pattern from the first half of 20th century. Both housing estates consist of two- and three-room flats. This feature represents the idea of the

¹ G40 type was originally developed in the town of Zlín (known as Gottwaldov during socialism) and had 40 flats; G57 had 57 flats.

housing estate as a class and occupation “melting pot” during socialism (Skřivanová et al., 2016).

The 1960s were an era of large housing estates in Prague. One of the first started to grow in the area of Thomayerova hospital near Krč in 1964. Krč housing estate was planned for 12,000 inhabitants in 3,800 flats (Vítek, 2007). Together with nearby Libuš, Lhotka and Novodvorská housing estates, it would be home to 50,000 people and create an independent locality on the edge of the metropolis equipped with all services and civic and recreational facilities. The Krč housing estate is interesting because of its vertical and horizontal segmentation. Its buildings have between 5 and 14 floors, and, as an unusual feature, several buildings have maisonette flats (Figure 4). The whole housing estate concept includes recreational areas and schools hidden in the heart of housing blocks and market lines around the busy road Štúrova. These elements were later applied to the largest housing estates of the 1970s and 1980s as well.



Figure 10.4: *Maisonette flats at Krč housing estate.*

Photo: Jiří Nemeškal (2020).

Similar-sized construction in Krč was done at Pankrác located at the northwest corner of the cadastral area and extending beyond Krč to Podolí and Nusle. The housing estate was constructed for 12,000 people in 3,630 flats (approximately one half of it in Krč) (Kovaříková, 2014). The housing estate consists of seven- and eleven-storey houses on greenspaces, with additional schools, shopping galleries and other infrastructure. The 220-metre long housing

row at the edge of the housing estate makes a barrier between the busy nearby road and the inner green area and elementary school. The construction of Pankrác housing estate helped relieve the housing shortage in Prague at the time it was built (Votrubec, 1965).

The last big housing estate in Krč was built near a former farm, Jalové Dvory, in 1980s. This estate is significantly different than the typical urbanistic concept of 1960s. The main dissimilarities are horizontal segmentation and semi-closed housing blocks configuration, which are more typical of housing estates from the 1980s, such as Barrandov, Velká Ohrada or Southwestern Town.

Post-socialist development did not bring much new in terms of urbanistic concepts. Most new constructions were to replace individual buildings, establish standalone residential apartment houses or refurbish existing commercial centres. The largest transformation took place in the Budějovická metro station area. While there was previously only a fire station and elementary school in this area, the post-socialist period saw the construction of a polyclinic, hotel and furniture store called “Dům bytové kultury”. At the beginning of the 1990s, the very first IKEA store in Czechoslovakia existed here for five years. Simultaneously, the construction of the first high-rise buildings had started. They were mostly built for banks or as offices for rent. Almost all empty land plots were built up and changed the locality into a modern commercial centre for Krč and surrounding areas. The beginning of the 21st century has brought new opportunities for the area with the construction of a new metro line D. In total four new stations should be open in Krč in 2028. The vanished centres of two Krč villages should therefore be revived, although with new functions and appearances.

Development of the number of inhabitants, houses and apartments

Krč's population development corresponds with the housing development described above. A slightly increasing number of inhabitants at the beginning of 20th century was typical for most peripheries around Prague. Significant growth occurred during the interwar period when the family houses were built. The population rose more than four times during the 1920s and 1930s. Slight growth took place in the 1950s when the smaller housing estates were finished, although there were only about 1,000 new flats at Antala Staška housing estate (Votrubec, 1965). The new large housing estates of the 1960s caused the highest jump in the number of people living in Krč (34,000). This population peak was followed by constant decline and from the 1990s the population has been fairly constant around 27,000. Post-socialism, the area has become more attractive, and the locality today offers a mix of different aged housing estates, family houses and villas and flats in newly build high-rise apartment houses. The number of flats is growing; however, the number of houses is unchanged. A significant decrease in the number of houses occurred in the 1980s when old houses of in Dolní Krč were demolished.

Development of the social environment and age structure

Age structure, like the number of inhabitants, has been significantly influenced by housing development in Krč. The population was representative of a typical periphery in 1930 with a higher share of children (0-14 years). More than 20 percent of people belonged to this age group, while in central Prague the share was about 15 percent. On the other hand, Krč had 16.9 percent of people older than 65 years. In comparison with its neighbours or the Prague average (5.2 percent), this number was extremely high. The explanation behind this was the opening of Masaryk's Houses, which served as an alms-house and poorhouse for old people of all of Prague beginning in 1928 (Moschelesová, 1937).

Young economically active inhabitants came to Krč between the end of the Second World War and the late 1960s. Age charts in 1991 show a significant share of people aged between 45 and 49 years and older cohorts as well. The 10-24 age group is also highly represented for 1991, which suggests how the construction of flats was a draw for young families with children. However, families with pre-school children were much less present in Krč in 1991.

The current situation represented by the year 2019 shows a stable housing structure without huge changes after 1989. Moreover, there is a visible generation change at housing estates. While many inhabitants moved away to suburbs, housing estates in Krč remained attractive because of good connectivity with the city centre using public transport, number of various jobs nearby, flat renovations and concentration of services. All these factors make it an attractive living space for young and mid-aged people between 30 and 50 years. However, the child population share is not significant at 13 percent. Such a mismatch could be explained by an unbalanced gender ratio with a higher share of males. The next typical feature of the age structure in Krč is demographic ageing. People in post-productive age comprise 23 percent of the population.

The social status of interwar localities is shown by construction prices from 1939. The map works with price caps which were introduced by government to prevent land speculation during (not only) financially uneasy times of the Second Republic. Krč cadastre has an elongated shape going from the inner Prague to periphery. The concentric price increase can be explained by the Chicago school theory described by Burgess (1925). Northwestern parts of Krč were the most valuable and the decrease of the price on the southeastern part was about 80 percent. There are two outliers to this trend in prices. First is Zelená liška housing estate, where prices are higher than 1,000 Kč/m². Comparing with neighbouring city part Nusle with similar houses is such price low and again shows on the different distance from the city centre. The second exception is the unfinished garden city, but here the prices are lower than qualitatively similar houses in Spořilov.

Compared to the Prague average, Krč inhabitants' have a weak social status (Moschelesová, 1937; Semotanová et al., 2015). The social status overview provides the map from 1970.

Secondary and tertiary educated people created a distinct spatial pattern. There was strong representation from this group in the newly finished housing estates Pankrác (45.4 percent) and Krč (38.3 percent). The reason was a low age of new incomers who simultaneously stayed behind the increase of education in Czechoslovakia. Highly educated people were also concentrated in the unfinished garden city (40.2 percent). This was because of the high social status of people coming there during the interwar period. On the other hand, the less educated population concentrated at older housing estates, such as Zelená liška (27.2 percent) or Antala Staška (32.9 percent). Such values were similar to the Prague average (30.5 percent). The lowest education group lived in the oldest settlements, such as Dolní Krč, Krčská údolí or Ryšánka. In these areas, despite dozens of family houses being built in the 1930s, the share of secondary or tertiary educated people reached only 20 percent.

The distribution of workmen and employees had a very similar spatial pattern. The highest share of workmen was in localities Krčské údolí (58.3 percent), Dolní Krč (52.3 percent) and Ryšánka (49.9 percent). On the other hand, the highest employees share was in localities Krčská nemocnice (67 percent), Sídlišti Pankrác (64 percent) and in the garden city (60 percent). The average values for Krč cadastre were, due to inner polarisation, comparable to Prague's average.

The same indicator of highly educated people is also used for 2011. The general increase of education was a main change and had an impact on all localities in Krč. However, the spatial pattern was slightly modified. A high share remained in the garden city (65.9 percent) and very low shares were in Krčské údolí (25 percent) and Zálesí a Na jezerech (41 percent). In the latter area, there were very few inhabitants and former dormitories or low-cost flats. The highest share was in the newest Jalodvorská housing estate (70 percent) finished in the 1980s. The population with very high social status lived in family houses and villas in the localities Ryšánka and Horní Krč (both 67,6 percent) and Budějovické náměstí (65,5 %) near the metro station. The situation in older housing estates varied. As in 1939, the distance from the city centre played a major role. Therefore, Pankrác (65.7 percent) had higher-educated inhabitants than Zelená liška/Herálecká, Antala Staška or Krč housing estate (all around 58 percent).

With a foreign population of 12 percent, Krč is not one of Prague's areas with a high concentration of foreigners. The most frequent nationalities are Ukrainians (30 percent), Slovaks (17.4 percent), Vietnamese (12.7 percent) and Russians (7.3 percent). These groups are also the most frequent in the whole of Prague. Other nationalities do not reach a share higher than 5 percent. Ukrainians are often located in Krč housing estate or in the locality of Krčská nemocnice (together with Slovaks). Russians and Vietnamese concentrate in the various housing estates in Krč.

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