

2 | KARLÍN – THE FIRST MASTER-PLANNED SUBURB AND THE CHANGES OF ITS SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT



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In modern history, the area behind the Poříčská Gate served alternately as a military training ground, recreational facilities for Prague citizens or for intensive agricultural production. As with other Prague suburbs at the time, the considered construction was influenced by the existence of the so-called demolition reversal, which required users to agree that in the event of war, they would need to demolish all buildings at their own expense. This happened, for example, in 1639, when 34 houses, a church, industrial manufactories and agricultural buildings were demolished before the planned Swedish attack on Prague (Míka, 2011).

Karlín was officially founded on June 23, 1817, when planned construction began in the sparsely populated area of Špitálsko (Míka et al., 1988). Eva Semotanová (2016) and Zdeněk Míka (2011) both identify Karlín as the first suburb of Prague. Although some industrial factories were located in Karlín as early as the 16th century, more extensive development at the beginning of the 19th century was characterised by the construction of residential houses in particular. At that time, several personalities of social and cultural life lived in the classicist houses of West Karlín (Ilík, Ouředníček, 2007), and the socio-economic status was comparable to the richest parts of the Prague agglomeration. At this time, only the Invalidovna, home to war retirees, stood in the east, forming a distinctive, fully equipped town with about 600 inhabitants (Míka, 2011) and military training grounds and cemeteries (see Figure 2.1).

A characteristic feature of the Karlín development was the rectangular structure of streets used at the same time in the United States with relatively sparse development and generous public spaces. The southern part had a residential character, a narrow strip adjoining the river-concentrated industrial activities. Initially, construction development was relatively slow with a number of vacant plots. This changed in the following decades (Maier, Hexner, Kibic, 1998). The second half of the 19th century was already marked by intensive industrialisation and urbanisation. A new port (1822), a gas plant (1847), and food, engineering and chemical plants were gradually added to the first textile manufactures. In 1901, the municipal council prepared an application for the independence of Karlín, and on March 28, 1904, the imperial privilege confirmed the coat of arms and granted Karlín the statute of a town (Karlín, 2017). Around the same period, Karlín expanded with a new Art Nouveau part adjoining the Invalidovna building. Karlín was also the seat of the judicial district in 1850–1929. The interwar period did not bring any major changes in the district. It is interesting that the relocation of larger industrial plants

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to areas east of the city centre (Vysočany, Libeň) is already described by Jiří Král (1946). In the mid-1940s, Král considered Karlín a stagnant city that is still awaiting further development. On the contrary, Julie Moschelesová (1937) considered Karlín to be a part of the wider centre of Prague.

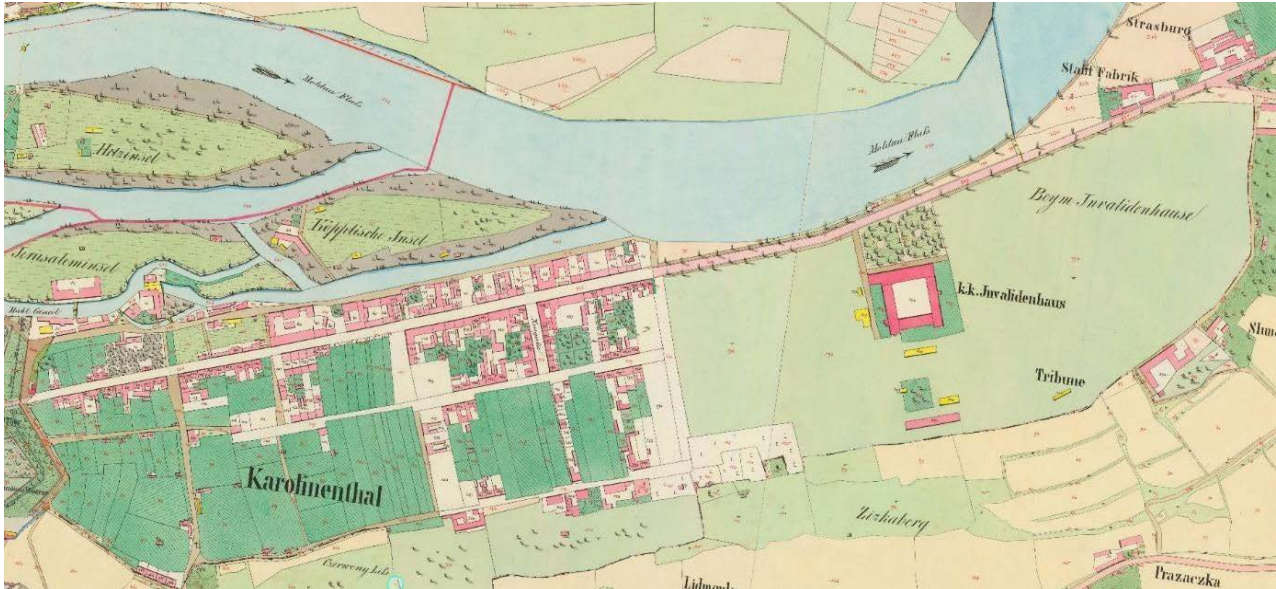


Figure 2.1: Map of the Stable Cadastre from 1843 with the detail of Karlín territory.

Source: IPR (2020)

During socialism, however, there was more physical and social degradation of the territory. Borovička and Hruža talk, for example, about the need to regulate the chaotic development of courtyards, to regulate transversal traffic or to build a new social centre of the district (Borovička, Hruža, 1983). The character of the new development in the old Karlín in the form of various built-ins is clearly visible from the main map. The level of the social environment is evidenced by the below-average indicators of socio-economic status described below. An exception in this period of stagnation was the new construction of the experimental housing estate Invalidovna in 1959–1967, which served in the following decades as a model for housing development in other parts of Prague (Maier, Hexner, Kibic, 1998; Zikmund-Lender, 2014).

At present, the territory is characterised by a number of processes operating similarly in the inner cities of many European metropolises. After the Velvet Revolution, massive deindustrialisation took place on the territory of Karlín (Bečková, 2011). Some industrial buildings have been demolished (for example, Rustonka or many others in the northeastern part of the district - see the main map); others serve other purposes and remain preserved in the physical structure of the district or only in the form of front facades and small industrial artefacts (Bečková, 2011). At the beginning of the 21st century, the territory of the former Rohan Island and adjacent areas became the dominant area of development. In the western

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part, a complex of office buildings called River City was built, with buildings named after world rivers (Figure 2.2). The area was extended by several residential buildings along the newly built four-lane road separating the old and new Karlín. The extensive flood in 2002 to a large extent accelerated the revitalisation of the formerly industrial and workers' district into a modern and easily accessible part of Prague, closely connected to the city centre (Ilík, Ouředníček, 2007).

In the described historical development, a specific Prague district was created, which is relatively spatially delimited from other parts of Prague (Vltava, Negrelli viaduct and Magistrála highway, Vítkov hill and railway) and at the same time strongly internally differentiated. If we generalise larger urban units, we can clearly identify the old classicist Karlín of the 19th century with a lattice structure in the western part of the territory, the Art Nouveau New Karlín from the early 20th century with the dominant school building on Lyčkovo Square and a number of green areas. The Invalidovna housing estate, established as an experiment at the beginning of the 1960s, and new residential projects around the housing estate are also apparent, as is the River City area with new development projects with residential and commercial functions around the Vltava (Figure 2.2).



Figure 2.2: Postmodern office building Main Point and the River City project's Danube and Nile House

Photo: Martin Ouředníček (2017).

Development of the number of inhabitants, houses and apartments

The most significant building in the second half of the 18th century was the military Invalidovna building, the foundation stone of which was laid by Emperor Charles the VI in 1732 (Míka et al., 1988). As of 1784, a total of 37 houses are documented to have stood on the territory of today's Karlín. The settlement at the beginning of the 19th century was thus rather sporadic and unstable as a result of several war events. Karlín did not exceed the value of fifty houses until the 1820s; the first modern census in 1869 indicates 249 houses. At the beginning of the 20th century, the municipal council managed to buy a meadow near the Invalidovna (1901), which was used to build a new part of Karlín, especially residential houses around today's Lyčkovo Square with Art Nouveau features (Figure 2.3). After the construction of Nový Karlín, there were 541 houses in the district (1910). An overview of the interwar Karlín shows the Table 2.1, based on data from the Statistical lexicon of municipalities after the 1930 census. The highest number of houses can be found in the population census from 1947, which indicates 687 houses; from the 1980s to the present, about 500 houses are registered in Karlín. Slightly less complete records of apartment dwellings for 1880 show 3,654 dwellings. The highest number of dwellings was documented to be 7,561, after the completion of the housing estate (SLDB, 1970). Currently, in connection with new construction but also with demolition and transformation of the residential function, we can estimate less than 6,000 dwellings.

After the flood, new construction development was concentrated mainly on Rohan Island, where the structure of land users in the newly built office buildings, but also in several expensive residential projects, changed radically. Several similar projects have also occurred on the outskirts of the Invalidovna housing estate in the last two decades (Figure 2.4). An example of new construction is the River Diamond project, which is one of the most expensive housing projects in the inner city of Prague.

Karlín's population trends are closely related to the housing stock developments described above but population data are available from a wider number of sources. Míka (2011) lists a total of 1,134 inhabitants in Karlín in 1816, including 608 accommodated in the Invalidovna, 2,264 inhabitants in 1831, and approximately 10,000 in 1850. Due to rapid development, the population exceeded 20,000 at the turn of the century. The highest historical value was recorded in the Karlín area in the 1921 census, namely 25,051 people; the lowest value was 10,532 people recorded for 2013. There are currently less than 12,000 people living in the district. The variable population growth is due to different demographic and migration processes. While rapid growth in the second half of the 19th century was influenced by rapid urbanization and the migration of people from the countryside and surrounding neighbourhoods to new construction, the dramatic depopulation of the area in the last quarter of the 20th century was mainly due to the predominance of deaths over births and aging. This development has stopped only in the last few years, mainly due to more intensive housing construction. Foreigners are currently a significant component of in-migration into the quarter (see below).

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Settlement	Character	Number of houses	Population
Karlín	district	542	23 903
dispersed temporary dwellings	dispersed temporary dwellings	22	94
Rohanský Ostrov	cluster of houses	2	5
Karlín – total	district	566	24 002

Table 2.1: Settlements forming the cadastral territory of Karlín (Census 1930).

Source: Statistical Lexicon (1934).

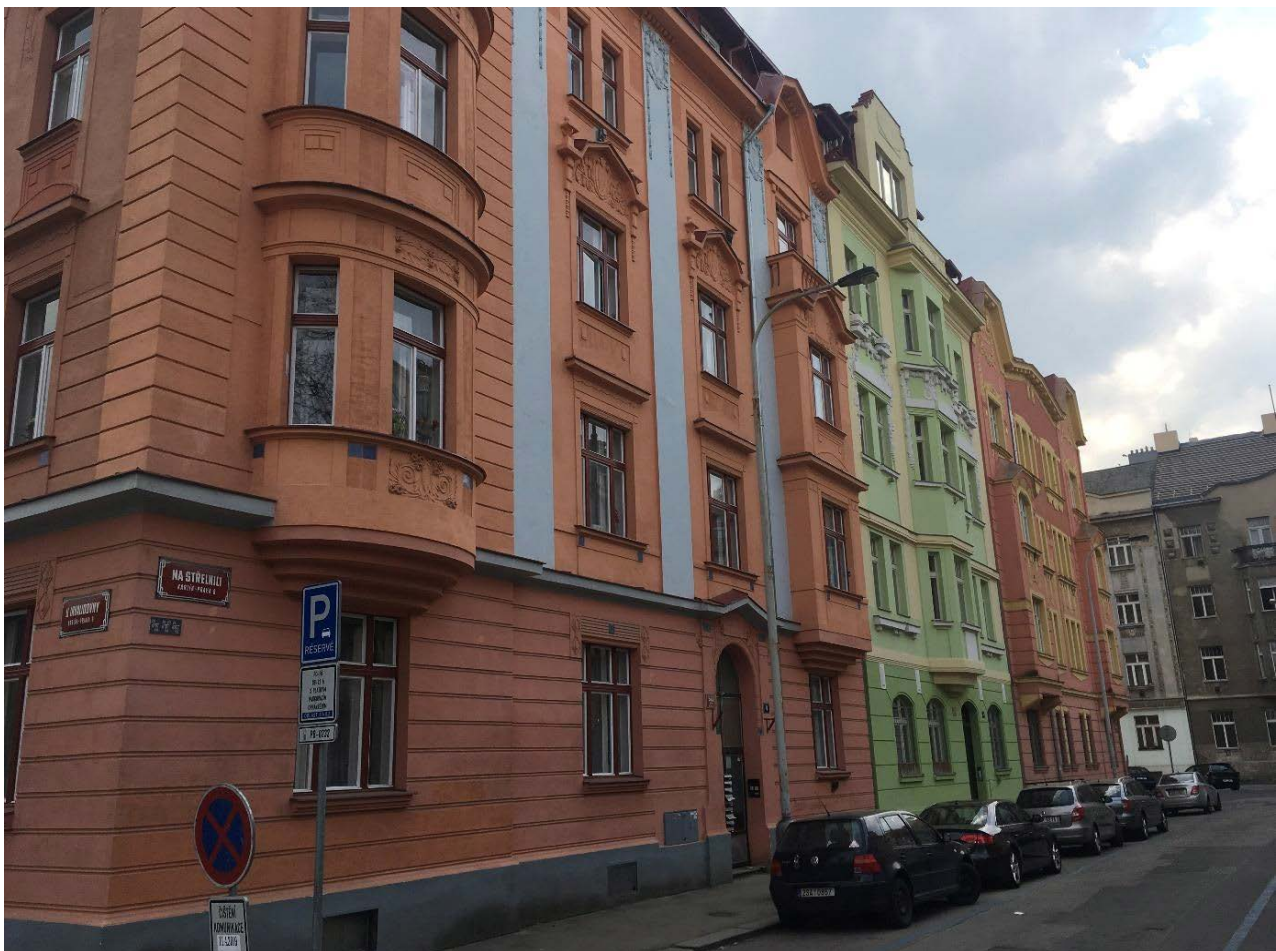


Figure 2.3: Art Nouveau style of New Karlín.

Photo: Martin Ouředníček (2017).

Development of the social environment and age structure

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, socio-economic status in Karlín was characterised by a clear west-eastern gradient. The internal differentiation can be assessed on the basis of data for the four census districts used in the 1900 census. The parts adjacent to the Nové Město (New Town) had much higher rents and a significantly different social structure of the resident population. The average annual rent for the most common type of apartment – i.e. one room with a kitchen - was 268 Kč in the whole of Karlín, and only 241 Kč in the whole of Prague. Rents were roughly as high as in Vinohrady and only slightly lower than in the prestigious New Town. In particular, housing in the western part of Karlín was among the most expensive housing not only in the suburbs but also in the whole of Prague. Similarly, in terms of the employment structure, Karlín was significantly differentiated. In the western part, especially in district I, there was the highest share of self-employed and soldiers (Ferdinand's barracks). In both districts, on the contrary, there was a lower share of workers and a higher representation of workers in trade and clerks. More than 55 percent of the employment base around the Invalidovna was manual workers. The most represented age groups were young adults between the ages of 15 and 29, with a surprisingly small representation of smaller children compared to other suburbs. Geographers Julie Moschelesová (1937) and Jiří Král (1946) both ranked Karlín in their classifications of socio-economic status into the strongest group of cadastral areas in the whole of Greater Prague.

Karlín's socio-economic status, on the other hand, was relatively low during the socialist era, with a neglected housing stock and unfavourable environmental conditions in the industrial district. This is also reflected in the regressive age structure of the entire district with a significant representation of the elderly (mapped for 1991). At the time of real socialism (SLDB, 1970), Karlín's population share with a high school diploma or university education was 27 percent, three percentage points less than in Prague as a whole. This was due, among other things, to the very old age structure of the population, with a very small proportion of children and low values of natural and migratory growth, especially in the interwar period (see Ouředníček, 2012). At the beginning of the 1970s, there were about four percentage points more workers in Karlín than in Prague, and there were about the same number fewer employees. Compared to the beginning of the century, the implementation of new development and the younger population of the Invalidovna housing estate and the Karlín-east urban district were particularly evident, where the values were roughly similar to the Prague average both in terms of the share of high school and university educated and the share of manual workers and employee professions. On the contrary, the western part of Karlín showed below-average values of education and higher shares of workers' professions. Compared to the beginning of the century, the opposite east-west spatial gradient manifested itself, influenced by the age of construction and by the younger population of the eastern part of the district.

The development of the physical, functional and social structure of Karlín, especially after the floods of 2002, is described by Ilík and Ouředníček (2007), who point out the impact of floods on the intensification of commercialisation, gentrification and construction of new development projects. The result was a relatively radical change in the socio-economic structure of the resident population. Data from the last census (2011) mostly did not take these new projects into account - for example, the River Diamond residential project was not completed until 2012. Data on education show average or below-average values in all Karlín units compared to the whole of Prague, with the highest value of 57 percent high school and university educated surprisingly in the urban district Za Invalidovnou. Almost 2,400 foreigners of very diverse origins are recorded in recent data on the composition of citizenship of foreigners in Karlín. Old Karlín is home to mainly Slovaks, Russians, Ukrainians and citizens from Western Europe, while Ukrainians make up 27 percent of the foreign population of the housing estate, where they are joined by Slovaks and Russians. The new housing on Rohan Island is home to citizens of Western Europe, British, French, Japanese and Russians. The representation of people of Vietnamese or Chinese citizenship is quite low in Karlín.

From a socio-geographical point of view, one can question the impacts gentrification and commercialisation have had on the socio-economic status or internal spatial polarization of the original and new residents and users of Karlín. Although the data do not allow us to precisely describe changes to the social and demographic structure of Karlín, it is clear that significant changes took place during the described two-hundred-year development of one of the first Prague suburbs. Originally a residential district, which was ranked among the strongest areas of Prague by social geographers in the middle of the 20th century, it became a socially very weak part of the metropolis during the socialist period, with a very old demographic structure and neglected housing stock. Although commercialisation and gentrification probably brought a number of negative impacts to the territory, including increases in housing prices and the displacement of part of the Roma population, socially weaker and older inhabitants, the change in physical and functional structure of Karlín can be seen as positive.

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Figure 2.4: In the core of the Invalidovna housing estate, a new residential project is being built on the site of the former kindergarten. Behind the hotel building is the Futurama office complex. On the far right is Pobřežní Street, which separates the new development on Rohan Island from old Karlín.

Photo: Martin Ouředníček (2017).

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