

5 | NUSLE – FROM VINEYARDS TO SKYSCRAPERS



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In the middle ages there were three separate settlements in the territory of today's Nusle cadastre: Dolní Nusle (in the Botič Valley), Horní Nusle (on the slope between Botič and the Vyšehrad plain) and Krušina (around the Church of St. Pankrác, according to which the district later acquired its name). References to today's Nusle in historical sources date to the 11th century, when plots in Dolní Nusle were donated to the Vyšehrad Chapter by Vratislav I. (Augusta, 1998). Medieval and late modern Nusle is described as a picturesque region with vineyards, leading to the nickname "Vineyard Valley" (Zelinka, 1955; Figure 5.1). It was a popular excursion place for Praguers, who were attracted by the rural character of Nusle, but also by the good amenities of the local inns with gardens (Scheufler, 1971). The situation changed significantly at the end of the 1860s, when little space for in-migrants remained in Prague, and nearby Nusle became a popular destination for them. Thanks to a significant population increase, Nusle soon became one of the largest municipalities in Bohemia. At the end of the 19th century, Nusle was granted the statute of a town and underwent significant development through the building of schools, roads and the establishment of a water supply and sewage system, etc. (Nepovím, Škvor, 1948; Augusta, 1998).

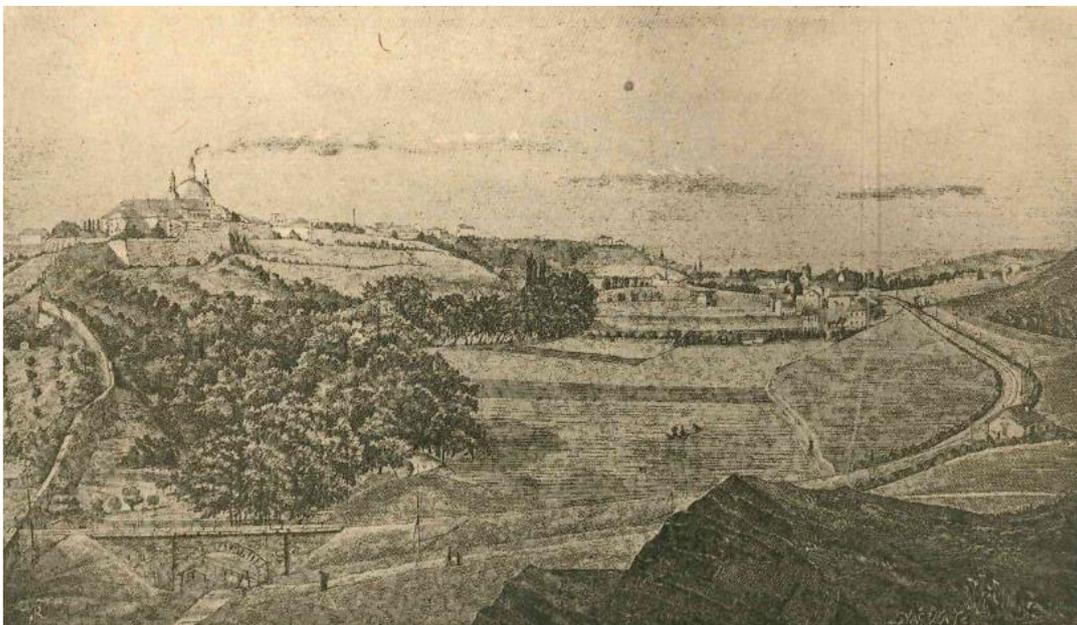


Figure 5.1: Nusle Valley in the 1880s.

Source: Nepovím, Škvor (1948).

Today Nusle is neither a tourist attraction nor a significantly profiled neighbourhood, yet there are a number of interesting remnants associated with the most dynamic growth period of the suburb. Since the end of the 19th century, several major industrial enterprises were established there, the buildings of which are visible even in the current built-up area, although many of them were converted to other purposes (mostly residential). Examples include the Nusle brewery in the Botič valley, the former ETA factory on the border of Nusle and Vršovice, office furniture works, margarine and candle factories, dairy operations, an automatic mill, a metal goods factory, washing machine works and a hat factory, after which today's Kloboučnická street is named (Bečková, 2014). Due to the ruggedness of the terrain, Nusle was unsuitable for larger industries despite its good transport accessibility by road and railway. Therefore, it remained a predominantly residential district (Scheufler, 1971). Nusle is inherently connected to cultural and historical events. According to legends, there was a spring in Jezerka where princess Libuše allegedly went to bathe (Ottův slovník naučný, 1902). Later, the Jezerka estate was founded there, today serving as the seat of a theatre. Other historically valuable buildings include estates that have been preserved until today, at least partially: Villa Bělka (built in the vicinity of the already defunct estate Bučanka) and the Reitknechtka estate (Laš'ovková, 2016). Fidlovačka is another important site in Nusle and is located on the former Růžkovská meadow, which hosted a popular festival of the same name until the 1870s. The festivities were later dramatised, including also a song that became the present-day Czech anthem (Hrubeš, Hrubešová, 2000). During the First Republic, a theatre was built on this historical site. Following a twenty-year-long hiatus, its operation resumed in 1998 under the name referring precisely to the local historical event, whose importance transcended the boundaries of the then Nusle settlement.

Although the fastest development of the district took place at the turn of the 19th century, Nusle has always been changing and the territory has gradually been built up. In the interwar period, cooperative construction took place, as can be inferred from street names such as "U Družstva Ideál" (The Ideal Cooperative) and "U Družstva Život" (The Life Cooperative) etc. During the socialist period, pre-fabricated housing estates were built in Nusle (e.g. Pankrác II). On the nearby Pankrác Plain, a high-rise building was designed, referring to the form of Paris's La Défense (Aulický, 2010). Finally, the long-planned project of bridging the Nusle valley was put into practice, resulting in the Nuselský bridge (Hubičková, 2014). Next to it, the neo-functional Palace of Culture (today's Congress Centre) was built at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. After 1989, several larger projects were implemented in Nusle: a building originally planned for Czechoslovak Radio and other residential, office and retail buildings in Pankrác (Figure 5.2). During the last century, demolitions also occurred in Nusle. Some older buildings gave way to newer ones (rural houses, shanty town Děkanka), and elsewhere the houses were replaced by transport infrastructure. Examples include a four-lane highway in today's Na Pankráci street and the pillars of the Nuselský bridge, which were constructed instead of several buildings in Svatoplukova street.



Figure 5. 2: Visualisation of the City Empiria building project by the architect Václav Aulický.
Source: Bým (2009).

Development of the number of inhabitants, houses and apartments

Rapid construction development in the late 19th century of the formerly rural Nusle can also be observed by the increase in the local population (*graph of the population in the map sheet*). It is noteworthy that the Nusle population grew mainly until 1950, and that it decreased in subsequent periods, despite the construction of some relatively large residential areas, such as the housing estate Pankrác II, a greenfield project along the border with the Podolí cadastre. The population in the Nusle cadastre continued to decline until 2001, following the Prague-wide trend. This was related not only to the unfavourable age structure of the district, but likely also to the out-migration of part of the population to the hinterland of Prague (Ouředníček, Novák, 2012). From the historic maximum population (over 60,000 in 1950), Nusle population shrunk by almost a half during the second half of the 20th century – to 35,000 people in 2001 and 2011. The population stagnation at the beginning of the 21st century can be attributed to the continued trend of migratory outflow of Czech citizens on the one hand, and by the attractiveness of the neighbourhood for international migrants on the other (Figure 5.3). Foreign citizens moved more often than Czechs to basic settlement units Nuselské údolí (Nusle Valley) and Nuselský obvod (Nusle district), while they moved less

than Czechs to the district of U Jezerky, which consists of villas, unlike the remaining Nusle territory where apartment buildings are typical. At the micro level, evidence also shows the preference for more expensive sites in the districts of U Jezerky and Nuselské údolí (Nusle Valley) among foreigners from developed countries and Russia, and a rather even distribution of other countries' citizens throughout the Nusle territory.

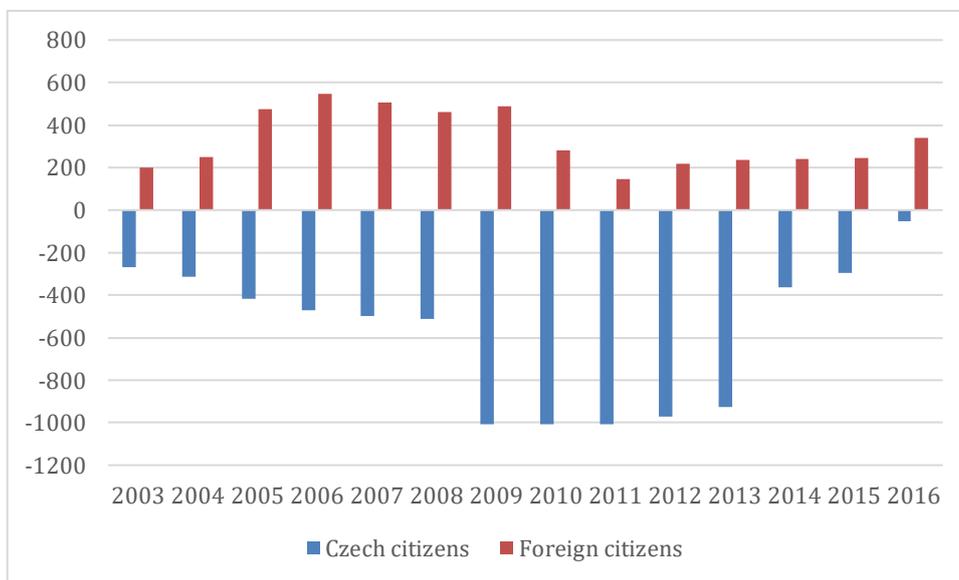


Figure 5.3: Development of the migration balance of Czech and foreign citizens in Nusle.

Source: CSO (2019).

Note: The balance was calculated as the difference between the numbers of in-migrants and out-migrants (absolute number). Five-year moving averages are displayed.

Development of the social environment and age structure

The age structure of the Nusle population shows the transformation of a young suburb attractive to people of working age towards a residential area with an older population. Despite a lack of data for the period of the most significant development of Nusle in the last quarter of the 19th century, an aging of the population is evident: the child component (0-14 years) accounted for almost 16 percent of the population in 1930, 14 percent in 1991 and less than 14 percent in 2019. On the contrary, the oldest age categories are more and more represented over time, which is in line with the Prague-wide trend of aging population (Dvořáková, 2017). From 1991 until present, the younger working-age categories have been growing in Nusle, which is probably related to the aforementioned increase in international migration to the locality.

The geographer Julie Moscheles (1937) described Nusle as a socially weak area of Prague in the first half of the 20th century. According to the 1930 census, the district was characterised, among other things, by a high population density and a higher proportion of labourers, and from an economic point of view it was a transforming territory (Moschelesová, 1937).

Historical sources name several specific social groups living in the territory of Nusle. Zelinka (1955) identifies railway employees, small craftsmen and clerks. According to Scheufler (1971), employees of the Prague transport company and the Pankrác prison also represented distinct groups, both with a certain residential concentration near their respective employers' sites. Other specific populations were the remaining rural population and inhabitants of shanty towns, specifically in Děkanka and scattered buildings around Reitknechtka. The general trend was one of gradual convergence of individual social groups in Nusle. Exceptions were the prison staff, who did not fit in the local population due to frequent service relocations, and settlers from Sudetenland and Slovakia. Scheufler (1971) notes that the traditional structure of the population was further impacted by the housing crisis after 1945 and the nationalisation of private houses after 1948.

During socialism, Nusle kept its lower socio-economic status compared to Prague as a whole, with 3-4 percentage points fewer secondary school and university graduates and 1-2 percentage points more labourers than in Prague in total. At the time, the Pankrác housing estate held the highest socio-economic status among parts of Nusle, while the least-educated, labourer population was typical of the marginal areas of Nusle along the railway line. Until now, the socio-economic difference between Nusle and Prague has decreased. The proportion of people with completed secondary and university education grew to 57.1 percent in 2011, compared with 58.9 percent in Prague as a whole. At the same time, the basic spatial differentiation of the population according to socio-economic status persists. There is still a socio-economically stronger population in Pankrác compared to the rest of Nusle.

Today Nusle is a residential area near the Prague city centre, but it also performs a commercial and administrative function, thanks, among other things, to a number of office buildings in Pankrác. Nusle is attractive because of its relatively affordable properties in some parts of the district and luxury residential projects in other parts. It can be assumed that together with the heterogeneity of the social structure of the population, the population of Nusle is also diverse in terms of citizenship – a trend observed on the city level (Přidalová, Ouředníček, 2017). In 2008, the Ministry of the Interior registered less than 4,000 persons with foreign citizenship in Nusle; in 2018 about 5,500 (ŘSCP, 2020). The most numerous groups are Ukrainians, who in both of these years made up around 30 percent of the foreign population, followed by Slovaks, who represented 16-17 percent, Russians (7-10 percent) and Vietnamese (6-8 percent). Among the relatively large groups of foreigners are also citizens of some Western states, such as the United Kingdom (2-3 percent) and Germany (1.5-2 percent). Given the growing proportion of foreign citizens with permanent resident status (37 percent in 2008, 50 percent in 2018) in Nusle, we can assume that a part of the immigrant population has been settling there.

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